BERLIN 1989: THE FALL OF THE WALL—*THE EDITORS*

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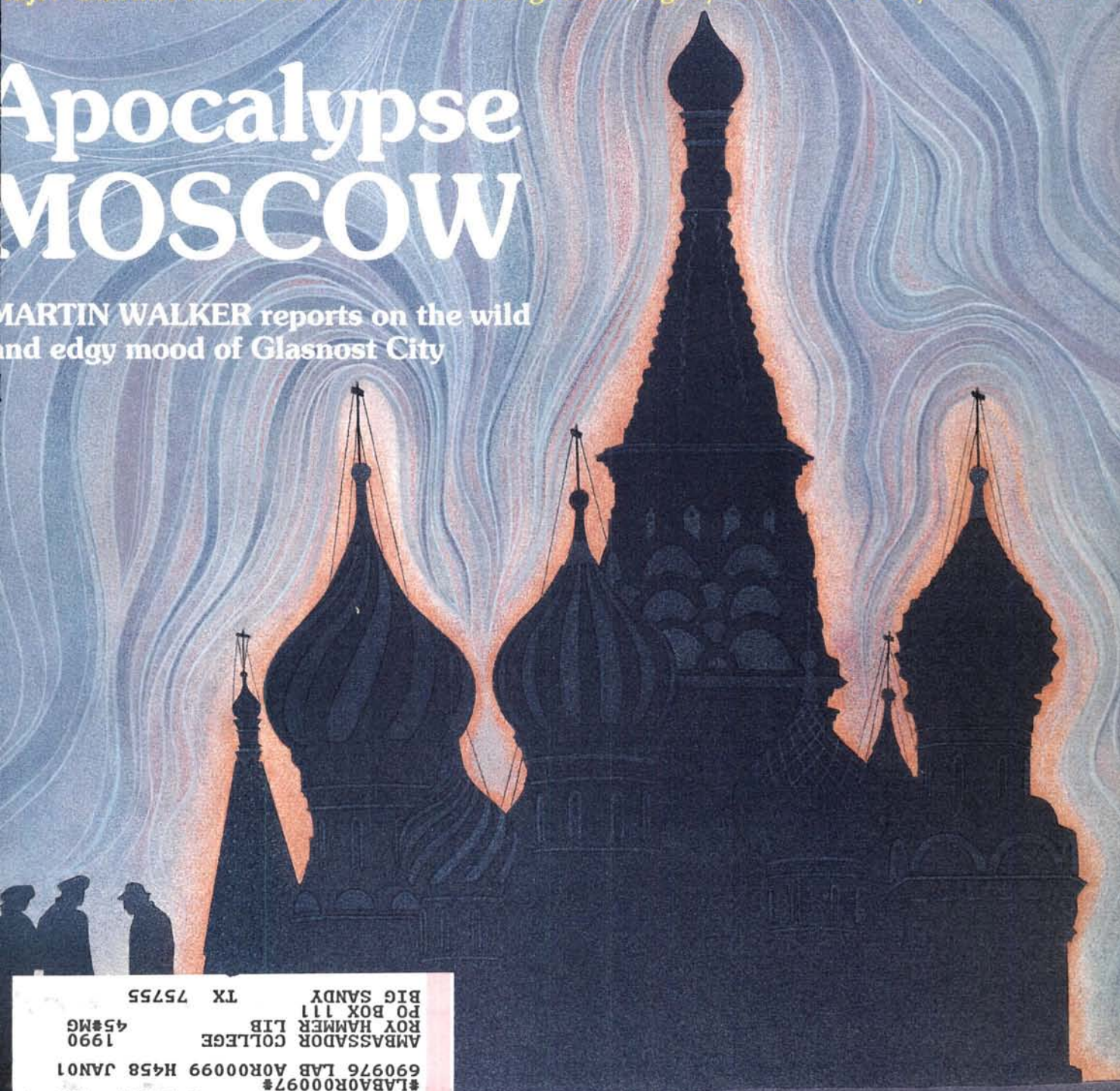

Apocalypse MOSCOW

MARTIN WALKER reports on the wild and edgy mood of Glasnost City

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STANISLAW BARANCZAK on Central Europe

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DECEMBER 4, 1989

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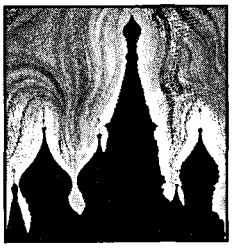

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FROM WASHINGTON

Who killed communism?

Jeane Kirkpatrick didn't get it as completely wrong as I had hoped. In her famous 1979 essay, "Dictatorships and Double Standards," she didn't say totalitarian regimes can never evolve toward democracy. What she said is, "There is no instance of a revolutionary 'socialist' or Communist society being democratized," and, "the history of this century provides no grounds for expecting that radical totalitarian regimes will transform themselves."

Nevertheless, the seemingly immutable nature of totalitarian governments, compared with authoritarian ones, was a cornerstone of her argument—and the Reagan Administration's initial policy—in favor of friendly relations with friendly dictators and implacable hostility to the Soviet Union.

"We knew, we just knew, all America, that this day would come," said President Bush on November 13 about the amazing events in Berlin. It's nice of him to include us all, but let me confess that I certainly didn't know it would come. And if he knew, he kept it a wonderful surprise. Conservative doctrine had been that it would never come. The mainstream conservative goal—shared by mainstream liberals, with arguments about ways and means—has been containment of communism. The loony right position has been to roll back communism through military action. But the conservative view (unlike that of the father of containment, George Kennan) has never been that a contained communism could collapse of its own internal contradictions.

Quite the opposite. The conservative view has been that communism could always rise above its internal contradictions. Its manifest failure to deliver what it promised would neither persuade its leaders as a matter of logic nor force them as a practical matter to abandon their quest for world domination—let alone their hold on their own societies. Ideologically and economically bankrupt regimes would not merely cling to power but squeeze their people even harder in order to expand. To pluck just one choice passage of many from Jean-François Revel's celebrated 1984 manifesto, *How Democracies Perish*: "a system that has grown so strong despite so many failings, that increasingly dominates the world even when no one wants anything to do with it . . . must nevertheless embody a principle of action and monopolization of power more effective than any mankind has ever known before."

No seer, I too accepted the premise. But I never really understood it. Why were Communists bent on world domination? There have been two sorts of answers, neither satisfactory. One is that they are committed Marxist-Leninist ideologues. That is Ronald Reagan's oft-expressed view, for example. But the Kremlin leaders are not fools. Only a fool could believe in 1989 that Marxism offers the best way to organize society for prosperity and happiness. Unlike earlier rather durable ideologies, such as the divine right of kings, that is what Marxism was supposed to achieve. And unlike other religions such as Catholicism and Islam, it is supposed to achieve those goals in this world, not the next. It must be awfully hard to get out of bed in the morning and go about your business of world conquest in support of an ideology that has been proved flatly wrong.

Thus the second explanation: sheer power lust. As one friend put it about a colleague (details changed): "The Soviets want to conquer the world for the same reason Sherwood wants to run the accounting department." This was Orwell's theory of totalitarianism in *1984*. O'Brien, representing Big Brother, says to Winston Smith, strapped to the torture table: "Now tell me *why* we cling to power. What is our motive?" Winston starts to say, "You are ruling over us for our own good," when O'Brien interrupts him, turns on the juice, and explains: "We are not interested in the good of others; we are interested solely in power. Not wealth or luxury or long life or happiness: only power, pure power. . . . [N]o one ever seizes power with the intention of relinquishing it. Power is not a means, it is an end," and so on.

This seems cartoonish. Can a society (or even an accounting department) be organized generation after generation, in the face of massive practical failure, to serve mere empty power lust? The most persuasive explanation of Soviet motives is a sort of combination of the other two, with the added factor of momentum. A bureaucracy has grown up that half-believes in an ideology it learned by rote and clings to a less ascetic version of power lust than O'Brien's—one that includes material advantages for itself as the society around it crumbles.

But if the truth is something like that, totalitarianism starts to look a bit more like authoritarianism. And it shouldn't seem so surprising that the material failure of communism should lead fairly directly to its political failure. Or at least that leaders would arise who attempt to reform it beyond recognition. One thing we couldn't have known until very recently, but people like Gorbachev must have understood, is how completely Communists have failed to reinvent humanity. Not only have they failed to remake human nature as Marx predicted, they haven't even managed to sell their own ideology to generations that have grown up completely under their control. Writing in 1982, Kirkpatrick said that this was the big question mark in thinking about whether totalitarianism can evolve. In Poland, East Germany, the Soviet Union, the answer to that question now seems thrillingly clear.

Conservatives, having said the collapse of communism would not happen, now claim credit for it. The congealing party line was inscribed in the *Wall Street Journal*, November 13: "America's victory in the Cold War was consummated by Ronald Reagan." (Hilariously, the *Journal* goes on to call for "a new order," adding: "Reform of the international monetary system would reflect the seriousness of purpose events now demand.") America's policy of containment undoubtedly hastened the day. But the party line that containment was abandoned in the 1970s and had to be reinvented by Reagan is 99 percent myth.

The record of the 1980s—on the defense buildup, on arms control, on promoting anti-Communist guerrillas, even on Star Wars—is pretty consistently one of Reaganite extremism (or fortitude, if you prefer) later modified or even reversed in the face of liberal opposition. This leaves conservative debaters in a pretty good position to have it both ways: claiming credit, as in Eastern Europe; deflecting blame, as in Nicaragua. To the extent that American policies of the 1980s had any effect at all in producing the current historic developments that no one predicted, what seems to have worked was an inadvertently clever good-cop, bad-cop strategy. Negative incentives for bad behavior don't work without positive incentives for good behavior. We offered the Soviets both. But communism obviously deserves more credit than it has gotten for being able to produce its own collapse.

MICHAEL KINSLEY

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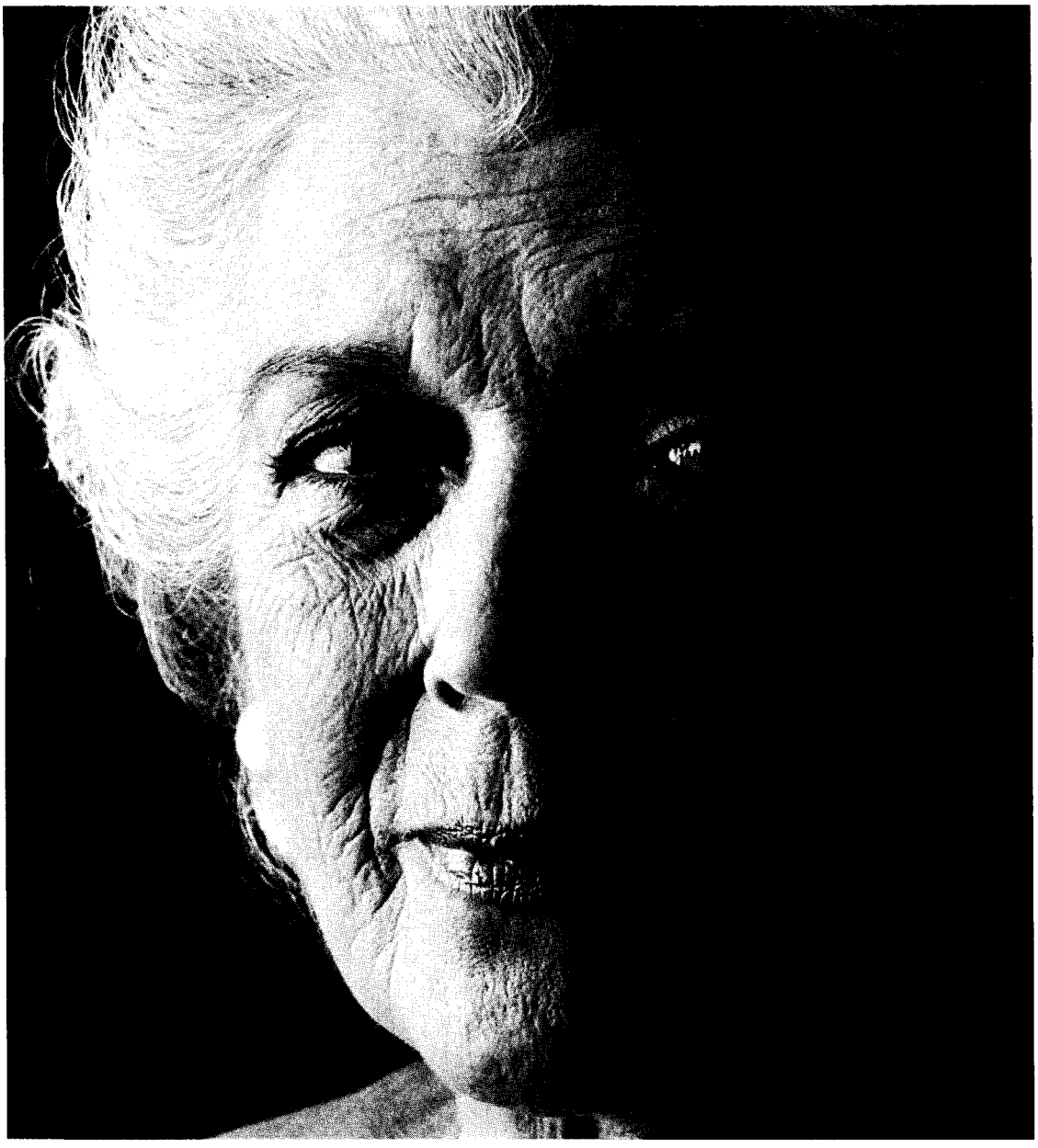

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CORRESPONDENCE

Age-old problem

To the editors:

To refer to those of us who opposed the Catastrophic Coverage Act as "a core of greedy and not at all needy geezers who pretended to speak for a much larger pool of poor who stood to benefit" is an outrage ("Cat Scam," October 30). My husband and I opposed this act, and Jacob Weisberg might be surprised to discover we were not influenced by any direct-mail barons—even elderly people are able to study the situation and make up their own minds.

It has never been the American way to make each needy group pay separately. We do not tell addicts that they must pay more taxes to provide clinics, or tell parents that they alone must bear the cost of building schools. Why then must a relatively small group of elderly who already have adequate coverage be required to pick up the bill for a larger pool of poor? They need help from all taxpaying Americans. I stand ready to help those in need, and I hope all Americans regardless of age would feel the same. Weisberg would obviously like to be excluded from giving any help, writing that the "beauty of the plan was that the elderly paid for the benefits themselves." Is this all he found beautiful about the plan? Now really, how greedy can one get?

THELMA E. BRADT
Sarasota, Florida

To the editors:

I have been a subscriber to THE NEW REPUBLIC for 50 years and I resent being called a "geezer." I am 80 years old now and I have as much right to protest injustice as anyone else. See how much you'd like being labeled "geezer" when you are my age. Shame on you for showing disrespect for your elders.

ANNE R. HODES
Manhasset, New York

To the editors:

Jacob Weisberg unfairly attacked the National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare. Even worse, he made no effort to talk to anyone at the National Committee prior to writing his diatribe.

Although this organization opposed the Medicare Catastrophic Coverage Act, it is ridiculous to blame us for seniors' dislike of the legislation. The act was designed to keep the percentage of seniors who will benefit at a constant level, no more than 20 percent. However, the tax aspects are designed to grow—rapidly. This year 47 percent of all seniors will have to pay some surtax. By 1993 more than half will—and more than one in five will pay the maximum, which by then will have risen to $1,050 per person. That's a stiff price to pay for benefits that for the most part duplicate those that about 85 percent of seniors already have. And the program does not attack what seniors consider their real need—help in meeting the crippling cost of nursing homes.

The National Committee did highlight the senior-only financing aspects of the act. But we made every effort to inform people of its tax and benefit implications. We pointed out that the surtax amounted to $22.50 for every $150 of tax liability, and related the surtax impact to various income levels. Some newspapers talked simply of the law's "nursing home" coverage, while failing to note that skilled nursing care is covered by the act but is needed by relatively few, whereas custodial nursing care is not covered even though many more seniors will need it. Our presentations were far less slanted than the television network newscast that used the family of a skilled nursing home patient to discuss the benefits, then moved to a golf course for discussion of opposition to the surtax.

The most erroneous of all the charges was the contention that the National Committee is an arm of National Direct Marketing Corp. That's as ridiculous as saying THE NEW REPUBLIC is owned by its printing company. National Direct Marketing simply supplies the National Committee with services; that is the only relationship.

JACK MCDAVITT
National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare
Washington, D.C.

Jacob Weisberg replies:

First, I did interview someone from the National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare: Denise Fremeau, who works in Mr. McDavitt's office. Second, to say that this group is an arm of National Direct Marketing is not at all like saying TNR is owned by its printer, since we were not founded for our printer's good, as the National Committee was for the benefit of its direct-mail "consultant." Nor is TNR's printer the co-owner of our most valuable asset, as National Direct Marketing is of the National Committee's big mailing list.

Al's field of foes

To the editors:

I am a conservative Irish Republican from Queens, but unlike the Italian cab driver whom Mark Green interviewed ("Al's Pals," October 30), I always thought that Al D'Amato was "a real sleaze, a low life." But whom did the Democrats run against him?

In 1980, Liz Holtzman. With the exception of Bella Abzug, there is no more grating a personality in New York politics. I would have voted for Willie Horton before I would have voted for Holtzman.

In 1986, Mark Green. Unlike the cab driver, I do remember him. What I remember is that he is the author of numerous books, that he worked for Ralph Nader for a number of years, and that he thought that I was *undertaxed*. In my view, two out of the three would disqualify anyone for elective office.

So come election day, I was going to hold my nose and flip the lever for the Fonz. But I just couldn't do it. I voted in the election but bypassed the column for Senator.

EDWARD FENNESSEY
Rego Park, New York

Honor roll

To the editors:

In "The Bottom Line" (October 23) the Washington Diarist rightly criticized the U.S. House and the Bush Administration for making a hash of the 1986 Tax Reform Act. Included on the list for his indictment as co-conspirator was Representative Richard Gephardt. Nothing could be further from the truth. Even President Bush knew Gephardt opposed the capital gains rate cut when he unwittingly confessed into an open speakerphone, "I'm displeased with Gephardt, the way he made it so personal." This apparently eluded the Diarist, who inexplicably included Gephardt's name on a list of politicians "responsible for gutting the finest piece of legislation in the past 20 years." Glassman proves the adage "no good deed goes unpunished."

DENNIS E. ECKART
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C.

Measure for measure

To the editors:

I'm grateful for David Norbrook's praise of my book *Reinventing Shakespeare* ("No Holds Bard," October 16), but his review contains a few factual errors. The silly description of me as a "superstar" is not in or on the book; it comes from the *TLS*. I do not "simply ignore" Marx; on page 203 I quote and discuss one of his few extended comments on Shakespeare (which had no influence on the evolution

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

DECEMBER 4, 1989

AFTER THE WALL

The first two phases of Western reaction to the opening of the Berlin Wall are now over. Unbridled euphoria about the liberation of East Germans has given way to delicately phrased ambivalence about the possible reunification of Germany. We might as well complete the cycle by devoting a few lines of unabashed nostalgia to the days when the Wall stood intact. No kidding. In terms of sheer stability, the cold war has possessed an austere elegance that is unlikely to be matched by any subsequent arrangement of nations. A world neatly divided into two sides, each headed by a rational leader armed to the teeth with nuclear warheads—can you imagine a planet less likely to be engulfed in war? (On the other hand, can you imagine a war more terrifying?)

To worry a bit about the new world is not, first of all, to regret the passing of the old. Any American politician or pundit who did not react to the breaching of the Wall with excitement bordering on ecstasy must possess either a hopelessly cynical conception of the purpose of U.S. foreign policy or no conception at all. There are few times in history when you can say confidently that evil is losing ground to good. In East Germany evil is now in embarrassed retreat, and it is a retreat whose import can scarcely be exaggerated. Just as slavery was the fundamental moral cause of the Civil War, the denial of political and civil rights in Eastern Europe has always lain at the core of the cold war. To the extent that these rights are restored, the cold war's gruesome structures begin to crumble. The process is hardly complete and is still not irreversible, but the progress has been palpable and, lately, breathtaking.

Nor does anxiety about the future of Europe imply an indictment of the German people. We would be lying, to be sure, if we said that the word "reunification" doesn't remind us of the suffering inflicted on Europe and the world by Germanys past. There *is* such a thing as national character, and if Germany's hasn't been mellowed by the last half century's reflection on its thuggish history—culminating in, but not confined to, the particular crimes of the Third Reich—then the world may be in for hard times. Still, the main cause for concern about Europe's future is not Germany's past so much as humanity's. Jumbled collections of nations and peoples have tended to find excuses for war in the absence of some larger ordering principle. And Europe, as the cold war's demise continues, is becoming a messier, more jumbled place.

A century from now, these anxieties may appear quaint. France and Britain possess their own nuclear arsenals, and for all we know nukes will have as solid a deterrent effect in a multipolar as in a bipolar world. And the economic sinews enmeshing Europe may indeed, as everyone is hoping, make war unthinkable. Certainly West Germany is for now fat and happy and, as the world's largest exporter, loath to threaten commerce. But if the unthinkable happened, a war in present-day Europe would be worse than all the others, believe it or not. It is worth worrying about.

This puts the European Community at center stage. The EC remains unlikely to evolve into the Federated Europe some dream of, complete with its own soldiers, but it is nonetheless rapidly acquiring responsibility for Europe's security. Not only in keeping would-be enemies in the same economic household, but in deciding which waifs from the East to adopt, the EC stands to become a primary source of order in a post-cold war world and the arbiter of Western Europe's expansion to the East. That is one reason Margaret Thatcher's dithering over whether to accept a unified European exchange rate is becoming so tiresome. If she is as concerned as she sounds about a resurgent, unified Germany, then her best bet is to ensure that West Germany's economic bulk, well before any reunification, is substantially constrained by counterweights. This will mean, first of all, that she quit complaining about some marginal loss of economic sovereignty. Britain, among other European nations, must realize that if you want to be an anchor,

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you occasionally have to get dragged along with the boat. (And this metaphor, really, is overdramatic. Notwithstanding all the talk about the coming German economic juggernaut, the addition of East Germany's present national product would boost Germany's share of the EC's economic output only from 24 percent to 30 percent.)

And what of the United States? Our stewardship of the world since the war looks increasingly good in the ever shifting light of present history. Where will we lead it next? Nowhere—at least, not by ourselves. The economic maturation of Western Europe and Japan, to our eternal credit, is now complete, and no event has better crystallized our attendant loss of power than the opening of the Berlin Wall. As almost everyone has by now acknowledged, it is not we who will orchestrate the further unfolding of European history. If the Germanys want to unify, they will unify. And the critical charting of the EC's future, of course, will not be done in Washington. All of this explains why, throughout the week of the Wall, TV moderators struggled in vain to provoke sharp disagreement among their guests over the future of American policy. (Do we sense an air of spiritual crisis beginning to emanate from the foreign policy establishment? If so it's not surprising: one minute you're standing athwart History in a global struggle against evil, the next minute you're desperately searching for arguments to the effect that America's role in the world will be "even more important" after the cold war. It's not a transition that anyone could make smoothly.)

In the end, the talking heads succeeded in defining only one big issue for American policy-makers. It's one you may have heard of: Whither NATO? This time it has been raised most notably by members of the suddenly growing pool of right-wing isolationists. (You know, the people who four years ago were backing an interventionist foreign policy by reference to concern for the downtrodden everywhere, and, now that America's hide seems safer, are advocating a full retreat into the North American shell.) They propose that we offer the Soviet Union a deal: we leave Western Europe, you leave Eastern.

It is a tempting idea, and the temptation goes well beyond the money to be saved. With Soviet troops gone, Eastern Europe could proceed more calmly with reform, buffered from any sudden reactionary spasms (a palace coup, say) in the Soviet Union. The trouble is that the buffering would hardly be airtight. East Germany is closer to the Soviet Union than West Germany is to us, and the Russians remain less likely than we to ask permission before sending troops anywhere. More fundamentally (if more vaguely), there simply is enough change going on in Europe now without introducing new and unpredictable forces. For the time being, U.S. troops in Europe usefully complicate any premature rush toward German unification, and, more generally, NATO serves to discourage other unforeseen and unthought-out realignments.

The latest episode of Whither NATO will get its full airing soon enough. Popular pressure at home and in Germany, along with valid fiscal concerns, will (if Soviet reform continues) eventually propel significant numbers of U.S. troops home, maybe all of them. But this is not the moment to hasten this natural process. And, anyway, it is doubtful that the Soviets would buy a zero-zero option. Mikhail Gorbachev's political base, amid all Russia's domestic problems, is likely shrinking; his advisers are assuredly not urging him to start bargaining away one of Russia's last large symbols of global significance.

So, as history would have it, the United States can now best serve the world by doing nothing. Or, at least, nothing epic. It can certainly continue to give aid and advice to Eastern Europe—in greater quantity, ideally, than at present. (France and Britain, too, if worried about an expanded Ostpolitik, might try to rival more nearly West Germany's sizable aid to, for example, Poland.) And, incidentally, if American venture capitalists are looking for new frontiers, they might ponder East Germany. The East Germans have been more productive than any other Eastern European people under the burden of a command economy, and as they shift toward free markets, they are more certain than any other nation of getting the expertise and capital they need. The United States engineered and supervised the first German miracle. It is in our interest—economically and politically—to play at least a noticeable role in the second.

NOTEBOOK

LOAVES AND BISHOPS: Deploring the fact that farmers get a shrinking share of the food dollar, Catholic bishops meeting in Baltimore in early November issued a statement supporting higher incomes for farmers. They also asked for protection of small and medium-sized farms and restrictions on the amount of farmland that can be sold for non-farm purposes. This scheme must be an article of faith, since it's not susceptible to reason. Farmers get a smaller portion of the food dollar now because Americans consume more processed food and restaurant meals than they once did. That doesn't mean Farmer Brown gets less in real terms for a pound of spinach than he did in 1949, just that more value is added before it is ingested in the form of spinach soufflé. The solutions the Church offers to this non-crisis would, however, make problems that do exist worse. The bishops want to increase farm incomes by raising subsidies. Farm welfare already costs taxpayers tens of billions of dollars each year and maintains food prices at an artificially high level. What the bishops propose would increase supermarket prices further, hitting the urban poor hardest. A ban on converting farmland mandates further inefficiencies: property that could be used more profitably in another sector of the economy keeps producing excess, subsidized food. And that land can't even be used for the most efficient kind of

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agriculture, since the bishops support regulation to inhibit large-scale producers. If they really want "to put the needs of the hungry and poor first," the bishops should pray their farm bill fails.

REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS: Michael Gartner, president of NBC News and formerly editor of the *Des Moines Register*, is to be congratulated for his perseverance in challenging the United States Information Agency's policy of denying the American public access to Voice of America broadcasts. After he was refused transcripts of programs that are heard by millions of people around the world every day, Gartner filed a First Amendment suit against the agency. His case was dismissed by U.S. District Judge Donald O'Brien in Iowa, but only after the USIA conceded most of his points. Gartner was told originally that the Congressional statute that created the USIA banned the agency from "disseminating" its programs domestically. The stipulation was intended to prevent USIA from bombarding Americans with propaganda, but the wording was interpreted to mean that private citizens could not examine transcripts of its programs. Reporters and scholars were allowed to take handwritten, non-verbatim notes in the USIA's office in Washington, but were forbidden from quoting directly from the material. Now, under the USIA's new policy of *glasnost*, anyone can come to headquarters and take notes. The secretaries will even turn a blind eye to verbatim transcription. But the USIA still refuses to allow photocopying, or to provide copies to anyone by mail. This may sound like a trivial detail, but in fact it violates the public's right to know in a basic way. Citizens with an interest in what VOA is telling Russians and Eastern Europeans should be able to check up simply and easily, just by asking.

POST HASTE: At the big pro-choice rally along the reflecting pool on November 12, reporters from the *Washington Post* were observed cheering the speeches. We'd better not mention their names, since they attended in contravention of their paper's policy. A memo from Executive Editor Ben Bradlee and Managing Editor Len Downie a few months ago forbade newsroom employees, including writers for the Food and Sports sections, to attend political demonstrations of any kind. Unfortunately, this policy eliminates the appearance of a supposed conflict of interest while leaving the conflict intact. If the *Post* thinks a reporter's opinions on a given issue are distorting his or her coverage of a story, the solution is to reassign the story, not to suppress legitimate citizenly expression of the opinions. If journalistic professionalism means anything, it means precisely that a reporter's personal opinion about an issue like abortion does not have to preclude being respectful of facts and fair to both sides when writing about it. The bigger problem here is the increasing tendency to regard re-

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porters as a separate category of humanity, a sort of priesthood whose members move in the world but are not of it. Journalists are citizens too, with the right to vote, give money to causes, and express their views at town meetings. They must be held to professional standards, but shouldn't have to take vows of political celibacy, poverty, and silence.

FREEDOM OF KITSCH: Two years after the Constitution's 200th birthday, the commission on its bicentennial is still spending $14 million annually on festivities. Although McDonald's is no longer using bicentennial trayliners for its burgers, the commission's chairman, ex-Chief Justice Warren Burger, has been keeping the marketing spirit of 1787 alive. Besides T-shirts, hats, and key chains, the commission has licensed the use of its official logo to makers of "heirloom quality furniture," crystal, and replicas of George Washington's wine coaster. Breakfast is a patriotic occasion in many homes, what with "Bicentennial Vignettes" printed on General Mills cereal boxes and milk cartons emblazoned with constitutional lessons. The commission is looking forward to the bicentennial of the Federal Judiciary next year and the bicentennial of the Bill of Rights in 1991. Hopes are fading that the commission will be decommissioned before the bicentennial of the Alien and Sedition Acts in 1998. •

The ebbing of pro-life politics.

ABORTIVE ISSUE

By Fred Barnes

Polls tell one story about what the abortion issue has wrought. The CBS/*New York Times* exit poll in the Virginia Governor's election found that abortion was the most important issue to 32 percent of the electorate. These voters cast their ballots this way: 17 percent for Democrat Douglas Wilder, who's pro-choice, and 15 percent for Republican Marshall Coleman, who's pro-life. Given the margin of error in the poll, that wasn't much of an advantage, if any, for the pro-choice position.

Pollster Richard Wirthlin has discovered roughly the same in his monthly national surveys. For every pro-choicer who votes reflexively for the pro-choice candidate, there's a pro-lifer whose vote goes automatically to the anti-abortion candidate. It's a wash. Of course, this is a recent phenomenon and represents a gain for the choice movement. Before the Supreme Court's *Webster* decision last July, there was an advantage to taking the pro-life position. A candidate opposed to abortion would normally attract twice as many voters solely because of this stand as would a pro-choice candidate. In other words, there were twice as many single-issue, pro-life voters as single-issue, pro-choice voters. But no more.

But as I said, polls tell one story, and it turns out to be a misleading one. The actual impact of the abortion issue on the 1989 campaign—and, more broadly, on American politics—is quite different. Two things have happened since *Webster*. The pro-choice movement, a zombie for nearly two decades, has come alive. And Republicans have panicked. Now it's pro-life Republicans who are stuck with the lame excuse that their "personal" position on abortion is not the same as their "public" position. In the Virginia race, Coleman acknowledged that he favors banning abortions in all cases except to save the life of the mother. But that's only his personal view. Coleman assured pro-choice voters that if he won, they didn't have a thing to worry about. He wouldn't act on his personal view.

Republicans like Coleman (and President Bush) are especially vulnerable on abortion. They were pro-choice in the 1970s, then drifted to the pro-life position in the 1980s as the GOP grew more conservative. Being pro-life made it easier for them to win Republican primaries. Coleman won the Governor's nomination largely with conservative support, which he wouldn't have gotten if he were pro-choice. His shift to pro-life was tactical, not ideological. "Coleman had no passion about it," says his media consultant, Robert Goodman. When his pro-life position was attacked by Wilder, Coleman wavered. He was afraid to defend his position vigorously. He simply didn't want to talk about abortion. When I interviewed him, he ducked a question about his position on abortion in the 1970s and was fuzzy on his position now.

Voters get bad vibes from evasive candidates. They can tell when a candidate is uncomfortable with an issue, when he's fearful that sticking with his professed position will bring trouble, when his palms are getting sweaty, when he'd like to change the subject. This isn't a problem for a passionate pro-lifer like GOP Representative Henry Hyde. He's comfortable arguing against federal funding for abortions for poor victims of rape or incest. If he loses votes for re-election, so be it. But many Republicans, maybe most, are more like Coleman than Hyde. Certainly Representative Jim Courter is. Though he'd been a pro-lifer in 11 years in Congress, he said during his campaign for Governor of New Jersey that he wouldn't "impose my personal view on the women of New Jersey." He won't have a chance. He lost overwhelmingly, Coleman narrowly.

Republicans have a special bind on the abortion issue. If they switch and become pro-choice, it won't help. A switcheroo would alienate pro-life Republicans, but it wouldn't attract many pro-choice Democrats, according to Wirthlin's surveys. "If there's a pro-choice Republican, Democrats who are pro-choice have a

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tough time voting for him," says Wirthlin associate Neil Newhouse. "They are less likely to cross over and vote for a pro-choice Republican candidate than are Republican pro-life voters to cross over and vote for a Democratic pro-life candidate." Newhouse says pro-life Democrats will rationalize that it's only on this one issue that they disagree with the Democratic candidate and that's not enough to switch. For pro-life Republicans, it's enough.

The worst part of the abortion issue for Republicans is that it threw them completely off-stride in their campaigns. Once Wilder began exploiting abortion in September, Coleman was stuck on defense. He stayed there until the last week of the campaign, when he finally forced Wilder to respond to other issues. Republican consultant David Keene says that by keeping the campaign focused on abortion, Wilder kept it off his own vulnerabilities. While he was on offense and Coleman on defense, Wilder soared from roughly half a dozen percentage points behind to a dozen ahead.

The effect of abortion on Republicans is similar to that of taxes on Democrats. When a tax increase is proposed, Democrats divide and bicker. In September Democratic National Chairman Ron Brown chastised Democrats who proposed a tax hike to pay for the war against drugs. Brown, in turn, was criticized for not minding his own business. Republicans looked on gleefully. Now abortion has prompted squabbling among Republicans. Coleman strategists argued for weeks over whether to respond to Wilder's attacks on abortion. Media adviser Goodman wanted to attack Wilder's blanket pro-choice stance as extremist. Others, including Republican National Chairman Lee Atwater, said no. Coleman finally fired back late in the campaign. But it was halfhearted and too late.

At the national level, pro-choice Republicans such as Senator Bob Packwood of Oregon and Governor Tom Kean of New Jersey are urging the party to abandon any position on abortion. "When you try to make an issue of religion or conscience a matter of party policy, you run into trouble," Kean declared at the Republican Governors Conference on November 13. But dropping pro-life language from the Republican platform in 1992 won't help. It's not the party's position on abortion that Republicans get blamed for; it's their own. And it's all but impossible for an individual Republican—or Democrat—to get away with having no position at all on abortion. Nobody likes a coward. Even if it would help, scrapping the pro-life plank from the platform wouldn't be easy. A platform fight would be breathtakingly bitter, dominating the 1992 Republican convention and overshadowing Bush's nomination for a second term.

Democrats aim to make abortion a major issue in the 1990 Congressional races. That won't be easy either. The *Webster* decision allows states to tighten their regulation of abortion. It tossed the issue to the states, not Congress. The best issue Democrats have in Congress is federal Medicaid funding for abortions in the case of rape and incest. The case against such funding is the toughest pro-life argument to make. Bush made it when he vetoed a bill authorizing funds for abortions. In doing so, says California pollster Mervyn Field, Bush left the impression that he opposes abortion in cases of rape or incest. He doesn't—he simply opposes the use of taxpayers' money for abortions. But the distinction is a fine one for most people. In any event, about 90 percent of the American people think abortions should be legal for women in these two instances. And a smaller but solid majority thinks the federal government should pay for them if the woman can't.

If Democrats keep the rape and incest issue alive, Republicans are in trouble. Goodman says that it's "probably an untenable position" in a campaign to favor a ban on abortions in these instances. Unfortunately, Goodman says, Coleman made only one exception to his no-abortion stand, and it wasn't for rape or incest. "If we had not been to the right of George Bush, we could have gotten along fine. But if your position is to the right of Bush, you're in deep doo-doo. The extreme right-to-life position won't sell anywhere." Goodman, by the way, was Bush's media consultant in 1980. Back then Bush was pro-choice and, Goodman says, Barbara Bush "was violently pro-choice."

To save themselves, some Republicans are desperate to flip the abortion debate from rape and incest to banning third trimester and sex selection abortions, requiring a waiting period, and mandating parental consent. Polls show these curbs are popular. But it'll be difficult for Republicans to mount a strong counter-offensive while still debating what their position on abortion ought to be, if anything. For the foreseeable future, the momentum is all with Democrats and pro-choicers. •

LA copes with the flood of Soviet émigrés.

UNDERTOW

By Esther Schrader

Outside Hollywood High School, near the center of the Soviet émigré community in Los Angeles, the line to enroll in federally funded English classes for adults forms most mornings well before dawn. The spirit is anything but comradely. Occasionally a fight breaks out among frustrated émigrés who jostle against one another, desperate to start learning the language they need to get jobs. But even those who make their way to the front of the line are in for a disappointment. The waiting lists for English classes at most schools in Hollywood have more than a thousand names on them, and

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the wait itself averages six months.

In nearby Glendale the waiting period for low-cost, federally subsidized apartments is three to five years. Recently a police riot squad had to be summoned when a crowd of more than 3,000 surged against the walls of a registration site.

Welcome to a ten-square-mile chunk of Los Angeles County that is both port of entry and home to more than 40 percent of all the Soviet émigrés who have come to the United States in the past two years. Decades ago private aid societies routinely assumed responsibility for resettling what was then only a trickle of immigrants. Those groups still exist in the Armenian and Jewish communities, but they have been overwhelmed by the flood of new arrivals. The slack has been taken up by county welfare officials, who have been working frantically—even heroically—to help the disoriented greenhorns get off welfare and into the job market and a new life.

The federal response to all this has been characteristically stingy and short-sighted. In 1987, when the Soviet government surprised the West by relaxing emigration restrictions, the Reagan administration responded to political pressure by raising immigration quotas for Soviet émigrés. The Bush Administration has continued that policy. Yet during that same period, the federal funds available to resettle the immigrants have been cut in half. The result has been to create yet another class of welfare dependants—and an unnecessary one.

Los Angeles has been hit particularly hard by the cutbacks. Southern California is the new Saroyan country, for many years home to the largest community of Armenians outside Yerevan. Nine out of ten Armenians leaving the Soviet Union in the past two years have come here, joining relatives and friends. And Los Angeles has a higher concentration of Soviet Jews than any American city except New York: the community has grown by about 1,500 this year, and 850 more are expected in the next two months. More than 19,000 Soviet refugees came to Los Angeles in 1988; this year the tally already stands at more than 12,000. But federal money for refugees in Los Angeles County dropped from $7.1 million in 1985 to $3.5 million this year. Nationwide, federal funds for refugee resettlement and welfare reimbursement programs were cut from $286 million in 1985 to $262 million. The amount of time the government funds refugee resettlement also has been cut. In the past, it fully covered the cost of a refugee on welfare for 36 months. In 1987 the period was cut to 24 months. In Bush's new budget, it is to be reduced to 15 months. But the cuts don't really save any money. They simply transfer responsibility for the émigrés to states and localities.

The problem was exacerbated when the Justice Department created a new category of immigrant late last year known as "parolees." The policy that created the new category was intended to alleviate a backlog of Jewish refugees waiting at processing centers outside Rome for permission to enter the United States. Even after the backlog ended, however, the policy remained in place, permitting an extra 2,000 people a month to come to this country. Parolees are barred from immediately seeking citizenship or from taking advantage of federally funded programs for refugees. Like any other legal resident, however, they are eligible for county and state-funded welfare programs such as AFDC, Medicaid, Food Stamps, and general relief. Joan Pinchuk, Los Angeles County's director of community and senior citizen services, complained of the burdens this has placed on local agencies. "We're sinking, absolutely going under, and the federal government doesn't want to put their money where the refugees are," she said. "We've got to expand the job-skill and English-language programs that can help these people make the transition."

There is some justification for Pinchuk's alarm. With English-language and job-training classes in Los Angeles already jammed by formerly illegal aliens seeking to become citizens under the 1988 federal amnesty program, newcomers have to wait. Effectively barred from working because they cannot speak English, many Soviet refugees sit idly in their apartments. The crowding is even worse than it was back home (there's an average of six to a room), and they rely on welfare and the kindness of relatives who themselves are scraping to get by. There are more refugees on welfare in Los Angeles County than ever before: the number rose from 60,553 in June 1987 to 72,000 this June.

The Bush administration seems not to recognize that refugee resettlement programs are a good investment. Many of the refugees leaving the Soviet Union are educated and motivated, and most are fully capable of becoming self-sufficient given the opportunity. County officials said that of 3,387 émigrés enrolled in government-funded employment training programs in Los Angeles this year, 1,908 are already working, saving the welfare system an estimated $2.4 million. And officials who run programs in English as a second language say that eight out of ten of the refugees who complete the course go on to job-training classes.

These days, however, refugees are increasingly frustrated in their attempts to become productive members of American society. While the Bush administration makes political points on the cheap, cities like Los Angeles are struggling with a new underclass that is getting bigger every day. "Just look around," said Sarkis Ghazarian, a social worker with the Relief Society. "A year and a half ago, when we found out these people were coming, everyone thought it was going to end. Now it doesn't look that way. It looks like it's just going to get worse."

ESTHER SCHRADER, formerly a reporter with the *Los Angeles Times*, is currently living in Yerevan, Armenia.

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Rajiv Gandhi's bumpy electoral flight.

PILOT ERROR

By Julian Crandall Hollick

NEW DELHI

Rajiv Gandhi was trained as an Indian Airlines pilot, and some would argue that he approaches politics as if he were still at the controls of a Boeing 737. A pilot spends the flight alone in the company of buttons and controls that respond instantly to his commands. He addresses the passengers in a voice of unquestioned authority through a one-way speaker system. Afterward, he exits alone.

Many of Rajiv's crew of bright young men and women have an equally tenuous contact with most Indians. They approach India's development problems through the computer terminal and the modem, when what is needed is people who can navigate the knotted jungle of caste, religion, traditions, and folk wisdom. One wonders if these two Indias will ever connect.

Rajiv himself speaks Hindi poorly, and his critics talk about his expensive tastes in vacations as though there is something "foreign" (and therefore illegitimate) about them. But most Indian politicians don't bother to share the lifestyle of their electors. Rajiv's problem may simply be one of class and temperament.

This helps to explain his faltering election campaign. He and the ruling Congress Party have just about everything going for them: name recognition, the Nehru legacy, a huge campaign war chest, an opposition on the verge of collapsing under the weight of competing political egos. The economy has averaged five percent in real growth over the last five years, and the government has liberalized import legislation, which makes it easier to make money and keep more of it. Most businessmen will be voting for Rajiv and the Congress Party. But the vast majority of Indians in the countryside have seen little of this newfound wealth.

The Congress Party controls the media, and in most countries that would be enough to ensure re-election. For the last year, television news has been blatantly slanted to show Rajiv and Congress in the best possible light and the opposition Janata Dal Party as a group of fractious incompetents who place personal ambition above the national interest. Congress politicians admit they're emulating George Bush's negative campaigning in the 1988 Presidential campaign. But in their zeal to please their master, Rajiv's minions have made TV news the laughingstock of much of urban India.

Rajiv's immediate troubles stem from political myopia and cynicism. In Punjab the olive branch is offered one day, followed by army repression the next. Separatist movements in Assam and the northeast, as well as in Punjab, have been allowed to fester so that Congress can appeal to the electorate as the only plausible savior of national unity and integrity. This ploy worked in 1984, but seems unlikely to succeed this time. Many accuse Congress of the same electoral manipulation of tensions between Hindus and Muslims. In terms of the actual numbers killed, communal violence is far less omnipresent than it was 20 years ago. But the emotional gulf separating Muslim from Hindu appears to be far wider than at any time since Partition in 1947.

The rot started in 1986. The Supreme Court had ruled that divorced Muslim women should enjoy the same rights as their Hindu sisters. When Muslim fundamentalists threatened to withdraw their support from Congress, Rajiv panicked and overruled the Court. Legislation was rushed through that effectively made Muslim women second-class citizens. Many women were angry, but Hindu fundamentalists were furious. They saw this as yet another appeasement of minorities, and began to push their agenda of making India a Hindu state.

Officially India is a secular state, meaning that if all of its religions and sects and languages and ethnic groups are to live in harmony there must be official tolerance of them all. Most Hindu fundamentalists argue that they're not trying to impose Hinduism as the official state religion. They simply want an end to special treatment of minorities, notably Muslims and Sikhs.

They found the ideal issue in the sleepy town of Ayodhya in northern India. Ayodhya is the birthplace of Ram, the legendary God-King of the Hindu epic *The Ramayana*. The Hindu groups, led by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), claim that the first Moghul Emperor, Babur, destroyed a temple marking Ram's birthplace and built a small mosque on top of its foundations. The VHP and its political ally, the Hindu fundamentalist Bharatya Janata Party (BJP), want to pull down the mosque and rebuild a temple to Ram on the site. Although the question of who owns the site is still before the courts, the VHP issued an ultimatum to tear down the mosque and lay the foundation stone of the temple. With an election coming, the VHP saw obvious political mileage.

The government hemmed and hawed and never really said no. The VHP agreed not to demolish the mosque for now, and laid the foundations for the temple adjacent to the mosque on November 9 while hundreds of thousands of supporters looked on. Inevitably, communal riots broke out in neighboring Bihar in which hundreds of Muslims were killed. Many have noted that riots always seem to break out in Congress-controlled states, and cite this as proof that Congress is manipulating communal tension.

Congress clearly has been trying to exploit the Ayodhya controversy to split the opposition. It was only against heavy odds that three parties merged to form the centrist Janata Dal Party. Rajiv and Congress realize that the coalition's left wing is extremely uneasy about its association with the fundamentalist BJP, and that without it, the opposition can't win in the north.

Meanwhile, the senior Muslim cleric in India has openly called on Muslims to do the unthinkable and vote

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against Congress. But it remains to be seen how many Muslims will abandon the habits of a political lifetime, and how many militant Hindus will revert to Congress.

Although the Janata Dal's programs are not radically different from those of Congress, its leader, Vishwanath Pratap Singh, once Rajiv's finance minister, offers a plausible alternative prime minister. The government propaganda machine thus fears Singh even while it ridicules him. The broadcasting minister calls him "a traitor, a quisling, a Judas, and a viper." Clumsy stories have been planted in pro-government papers accusing his son Ajeya, and by implication V. P. Singh himself, of embezzling $21 million and stashing it away in a St. Kitts bank. Indian TV treats all this as fact. More diligent investigators have discovered the bank declared insolvency and never had more than $1 million in assets.

V. P. Singh exudes a quiet anger at these attacks, and he conveys a (Mahatma) Gandhian sense of moral outrage. He talks of restoring national honor, of an India ruled by Indians. He has made Rajiv Gandhi and corruption scandals the centerpiece of his campaign.

In 1986 the Swedish arms company Bofors won a huge contract to supply the Indian army with field artillery. It was later revealed that Bofors had paid three dummy companies between $50 million and $200 million in kickbacks to land the contract. Most people assume that the money went through a labyrinth of paper companies and into the Congress Party coffers. Few seem to think that Rajiv or his family have profited personally. No one as yet has turned up a smoking gun.

Bofors spells trouble for Rajiv because it shows either that he is politically inept or that he has been lying to cover up someone close to him. He consistently maintained that no Indian had received money from Bofors, until October, when the release of an official Swedish report on the affair conclusively proved otherwise. But many of the Janata Dal are also tainted by scandals. The immediate question is whether the electorate either knows or cares.

Landless laborers may never have heard of Bofors, but they are well aware of the increasing corruption visible in towns and villages across India. Five years of government largess and economic growth have meant lots of public works money from Delhi. And the average Indian rightly suspects that much of that has been skimmed off to line the pockets of village and small-town contractors who have abandoned their mud huts and bicycles for air-conditioned houses and new cars. That Rajiv Gandhi may have done the same is perhaps less serious than that he may have compromised the nation's security by ordering inferior weapons, and then lied. As with Watergate, voters may be more angered by the alleged cover-up than by the original event itself.

Gandhi has been drawing poor crowds to his rallies. He has a dismal track record: ten straight losses in state elections in five years. Now he could lose the national election as well. A few weeks ago, when his respected defense minister refused to stand in the elections, Congress partymen looked everywhere for Rajiv for an explanation. Characteristically, he was at home, poring over computer printouts. The Congress sycophants in each state wanted Rajiv to choose all the candidates for their constituencies. And there he was, the airline pilot to the last, struggling to master every detail in a country that has become simply too vast and too unwieldy for micro-management or rule by one man.

JULIAN CRANDALL HOLLICK frequently reports on India for National Public Radio.

Britain's painful brain drain.

SCHOLAR SLIP

By Alan Ryan

PRINCETON

The brain drain from Thatcherite Britain has taken on the coloring of the exodus of Jews, liberals, and socialists from Germany and central Europe in the late 1930s. Eighteen months after moving to Princeton I find, disconcertingly, that most of my colleagues and all of my students are far less interested in what I think, write, or teach than in my supposed status as a refugee. Tony Judt is a distinguished student of the left in postwar France, David Cannadine an immensely accomplished writer on the 18th century, Bernard Williams an imaginative and controversial moral philosopher, and Simon Blackburn one of the very best younger philosophers of language. But it's not their writings that really attract Americans. It's the fact that they are not composing them anymore at Oxford or Cambridge, not long ago believed to be the best universities in the world.

Nobody seems to have hard evidence about just how big this exodus really is. The British government estimates that about 200 scholars a year leave Britain for overseas universities—a figure it claims is offset by a couple of hundred foreign scholars entering Britain. Although Thatcher has every reason to minimize the size of the brain drain, this is probably quite close to the truth. Academics, who are among the government's most merciless critics, tend to dispute not the numbers but their significance. They say it's the established and/or distinguished who are leaving, the raw beginners who are entering.

What's not in dispute is that academics in particular and intellectuals in general overwhelmingly dislike Mrs. Thatcher. Several years ago the faculty of the University of Oxford snubbed its most powerful alumna by voting 2-to-1 to deny her an honorary degree. It's true that the philosopher Lord Quinton and the historian Lord Blake manfully spoke up on her behalf. And she has a few other supporters here and there. The radical his-

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torian Hugh Thomas went on to run the Tory research department, and is now Lord Thomas; and Paul Johnson is unique only in the noisiness of his conversion from radical left to radical right. Economists, too, have shown some enthusiasm for the free market theorizing of the Thatcher government.

But academics who ordinarily would have been soggily unpolitical have become unsoggily hostile. Thatcherism, they believe, is largely to blame for the indignities their profession has suffered in recent years. Tenure has been abolished. Salaries have dropped some 20 percent behind the rate of inflation, while other groups paid out of public funds have generally kept ahead of it. The number of teachers in higher education has dropped over the past ten years by about a sixth; in philosophy, a quarter of teaching jobs have gone. Meanwhile, the government continues to lecture the universities on their responsibility for the appallingly unproductive character of the British economy.

It's true that back in the expansive '60s, universities promised a British economic miracle. Now we know that although Britain can produce more graduate engineers than Germany, it has barely a third as many technicians. Those with engineering degrees would rather go into fields like investment banking, where the financial rewards are substantially higher.

The problem really goes beyond the universities. Like the United States, Britain desperately needs an improved secondary education system. Although drugs and guns don't generally plague British inner-city schools, most other American problems do. The best-educated British students compare very favorably with any in the world. But the same tests that reveal that American students know less about the geography of the United States than Norwegians do also reveal that the British score exactly as poorly as Americans—though marginally better than Mexicans and Italians. Twelve-year-old Japanese children solve math problems that defeat 15-year-old British students, and the British unwillingness to learn foreign languages seems unshakable.

The illiteracy and innumeracy of the work force is terrifying to contemplate, and the almost complete absence of technical education stands in appalling contrast to what is done in West Germany and Scandinavia. Over half of all British children leave school for full-time work—or unemployment—at 16, whereas 90 percent of Swedish children remain in full-time education or combine late secondary education with work training. In Britain apprenticeships have all but died out over the past 20 years.

Given all this, many academics would grit their teeth in a public-spirited fashion if they felt that higher education were being held back for the sake of real and productive innovation elsewhere. What drives them to despair is the government's apparent indifference to any such ideas. A government running a colossal surplus (pushing toward $10 billion) seems intent upon shrinking a small, high-quality university system simply to save a few million pounds. It is as self-defeating as the withdrawal of federal funds from higher education in the United States—more so, actually, since British universities lack both the private and the state funding that sustains American high education in the absence of federal money.

The flagship universities—Oxford, Cambridge, and to a lesser extent London—are not in any immediate danger of financial or intellectual collapse. The finances of Oxford and Cambridge are mysterious even to those who work there, because of the division of responsibilities between the university and its component colleges. The university prescribes syllabi; sets examinations; awards degrees; appoints university lecturers and professors, and pays their salaries; and builds laboratories, lecture theaters, and libraries. This all comes to about $175 million a year, of which a bit under half comes directly from the government.

Meanwhile the colleges provide tutorial teaching; feed and house the students; and appoint fellows, who may or may not have a university post as well. They spend probably about the same amount again, none of it directly provided by the government. The universities of Oxford and Cambridge and most of the individual colleges have launched appeals to build their endowments to a level that will give them more independence from government policy. Being large, well off, and much loved by their alumni, they aren't likely to slip much further behind Harvard and CalTech as world-class research institutions.

The rest of the university system is in a much worse state. Misled by demographics, the government budgeted for a drop in students in the 1990s. It now appears that although the total population of 18-year-olds will fall, applicants won't. This is not, alas, because more working-class students want to go to college, but because the drop in the birthrate was a drop in the working-class birthrate only. The middle-class cohort hasn't shrunk, so universities face the prospect of teaching more and more students with resources that shrink at a compound rate of some two percent per annum. In the United States, where about 24 percent of the population now graduates from a four-year college of some sort, it might not matter so much if some universities were deprived of the ability to teach a full range of courses or of doing decent research. In Britain only a quarter as many students get to university, a fact that has always been justified by the assumption that the entire system catered to the elites. This has never been wholly true, and with continuing cuts in education spending it's very unlikely to be even partially true much longer.

All of this tends to induce the feeling that Mrs. Thatcher represents the victory of those who positively dislike education, a dislike embodied in her assistants. Relations between the academic community and Robert Jackson, the present minister for higher education, display this antagonism in the most paradoxical form. Jackson is a graduate of Oxford; he was an extremely bright young man, and won a Prize Fellowship to All

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Souls', the summit of the bright Oxonian's ambition. Nevertheless, he hates Oxford, loathes academics, and has worse relations with the people he is supposed to be looking after than any minister I can remember. Far from standing up for them and extracting an adequate budget from the Treasury, he regards academics as time-wasters, who do neither the teaching nor the research for which they are paid, and who need a stiff dose of market discipline. Yet he himself used his time at All Souls' to find a seat in the European Parliament. (And when he moved on to the House of Commons, he passed the seat on to his wife.)

A clever and cantankerous man, he alienated even his supporters this summer by writing an attack on A. J. Ayer in the *Independent* a couple of days after Ayer had died, unable to resist the chance of tarring contemporary philosophers with the brush of Ayer's skepticism and agnosticism. In a climate like that, it's easy to feel tempted by any tolerably friendly offer from abroad.

The government is partly right when it argues that the brain drain has gotten no worse in recent years. People have been tempted to cross the Atlantic for much longer than the last decade. What it does not say so loudly is that there is a frightful problem of non-renewal at home. A shrinking system has little room for recruits, and in most British universities the average age of the faculty is rising steadily. Schemes for early retirement have created a little room for newcomers, but overall the spectacle has been one of a tremendous rejuvenation of the profession during the expansive '60s, followed by a steady lengthening of the teeth during the stagnant '70s and the shrinking '80s. That makes for gloom and boredom. It also puts the cleverest undergraduates off the whole academic business. As a result there are fewer graduate students, they are not as good as they ought to be, and they are depressed by the grimness of their job prospects.

If the academic community is glumly resentful, it is the unacademic intellectuals who really work up a hatred of Mrs. Thatcher and all she stands for. It must look pretty odd to Americans who notice that the London theater, which is heavily subsidized by public funds, puts on plays by Howard Brenton and David Hare that maintain that Thatcherite Britain is only marginally better than Hitler's Germany or de Klerk's South Africa.

Their moral disdain is not remotely fueled by economic privation. Salman Rushdie (before he found himself the target of the Ayatollah's hit men), along with Lady Antonia Fraser, Harold Pinter, and others of the glitterati, amused unkind commentators by calling together a group of their friends to think of ways of rejuvenating the left. To this set, it is the vulgarity of the Thatcher regime that is so intolerable. The literary left is as upset as the traditional right by the Tory party's transformation from the gentlemen's party to that of bond dealers and advertising executives.

On the educational scene the complaint is practical. Mrs. Thatcher was, after all, minister of education in the early 1970s. At the time she was expansion-minded, and a great enthusiast for preschool education. As prime minister, she has allowed ideological zeal to prevail over common sense. She has taken a system that needed a good deal of patient reform, and by bullying and meanness has alienated the very people who could have made it work again.

ALAN RYAN taught politics at New College, Oxford, until 1988.

Campaign tips for Magyars.

DANUBE FEVER

By Alex Heard

"We believe Coleman is dedicated to getting the hand of government out of the lives of the people," the man said. "And we want this, too! Yes?"

"Uh, yes," I said, nodding vigorously. "Yes, yes."

Under normal circumstance the equation *Marshall Coleman = Freedom Fighter* might prompt a different reaction from me—maddened gurgling, say—but these weren't normal circumstances. The speaker was a friendly Hungarian engineer named Andor Komlos, a member of the Independent Smallholders, a party of middle-class entrepreneurs that was quashed by the Communists in 1948 but re-emerged in 1988.

Komlos and members of six other Hungarian opposition parties were in the Washington area recently to take part in a crash course on American Government sponsored by the U.S. Information Agency. Early next year Hungary will hold its first free elections since 1949, and the group had graciously consented to let me tag along for part of their closest exposure to Pols, American-style: a four-day look at the rambunctious and cheesy Virginia Governor's race. Would this be a landmark sharing of free-election methods? Or the regrettable introduction of deadly bacilli into a vulnerable petri dish of democracy?

As we whizzed toward Dulles Airport for a Saturday morning tarmac press conference featuring Coleman, HUD Secretary Jack Kemp, and Senator John Warner, I observed with alarm that Komlos wasn't the only one associating the Atwateresque hack Coleman with the sort of guy who attacks tanks with a flagpole. But I kept my mouth shut. This was a sharp group of people slated for a dense schedule of lectures from policy experts of many stripes. They could form their own opinions. Besides, I had enough to do sorting out the who's and

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what's of seven parties I knew nothing about.

To my left sat Ferenc Mozsi of the Hungarian People's Party. This group supports the presidential candidacy of Imre Pozsgay, a leader in the reform wing of the ruling party—the former Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, which remade itself on October 7 into the non-Communist Hungarian Socialist Party. Mozsi wasn't overly popular. As he handicapped the clout of the parties in the van for me, I noticed scowls on a few faces. Finally Levente Levay, campaign manager of the Free Democrats (who want a strong parliament, a weak West German-style presidency, and a rapid shift to a free market economy), snapped, "Be aware that not everyone agrees with what he says!"

This caused an exchange of Hungarian angry-speak. Positioned somewhere between these two were Komlos; Tibor Varga of the Social Democrats (a workers' party that would prefer to reform the economy more slowly); Lajos Posze, campaign manager for the Hungarian Democratic Forum (HDF), the largest and currently most influential opposition group (they push a "third way" between capitalism and socialism); a local HDF organizer, Gyongyver Bardos; Miklos Lukats of the Christian Democrats; and 22-year-old Zoltan Matuska of the Young Democrats Association, an anti-Communist student group aligned with the Free Democrats.

Quite a range. But at Dulles we met a man who could bring them together. No, not Coleman. Kemp. As our bunch and a gang of television news people awaited Coleman's arrival, Kemp got wind of the presence of eight life forms ripe for his Conservative Opportunity Society and waded in, kneading shoulders and rasping inspirationally. "Aaaaaah," he began, "we . . . *applaud* what is happening in Hungary. We welcome you. My fellow liberal democrats. Aaaaah. In the classic sense of that phrase. Small l, small d! Freedom. Human rights. And free markets." At this point, Washington Redskins coach Joe Gibbs huffed by carrying a stack of jerseys. Kemp reached out and thrust him into the Hungarian semi-circle. "This is a great American hero, my friends!" Then to Gibbs: "These people are members of the Hungarian opposition!" (Gibbs's reply, in classic coachspeak: "Fannntastic.") Kemp explained that "both of us come out of American football," mimed to demonstrate that soccer players kick while footballers pass, showed his AFL championship ring, rattled off a number of must-read economic texts, and invited the entire delegation to visit him the following week at HUD.

I don't how much of this various Hungarians understood—but judging by their grins and rapid replies of "Yes, vergood," they obviously enjoyed the friendly politicking. And I felt sure that Kemp's gusto would contrast instructively with the GOP waxman. It worked for me, anyway. Coleman was at his alienating best at this press conference, as he whined that the media were giving his opponent, Douglas Wilder, an unfair advantage with puff coverage, dipsy-doodled around questions regarding his abortion stand, and waved a copy of a secret cassette tape that "proved" how Wilder had sold out to labor. Afterward I asked Lukats what he thought. "Very slick," he said with a sly smile.

Saturday afternoon at Mt. Vernon was like a scene from *Budapest on the Potomac*. Levay zigzagged about, videocamming everything, and a delighted Komlos fell in with equally excited Cub Scouts behind a detail of marching, fife-playing Revolutionary soldiers. The group went on to Charlottesville on Sunday; I rejoined them Election Day morning in Richmond. In the lobby of the downtown Marriott (where Wilder's victory celebration would be held), we were informed that Coleman was fogged in upstate and had canceled his local press conference. So the morning schedule was open—what would everyone like to do? Through the translators' convoy, the answer came rocketing back: Let's go shopping.

As we headed out to a mall, I sensed a mood shift, especially from Levay, who sat next to me exhaling and muttering until I asked what was wrong. He said the group was driving around too much and getting too many lectures and not enough useful information. He pointed out that American politicians' campaign tactics have no bearing on Hungarian realities. Above all, Magyar electioneering will be severely curtailed by a lack of cash. The HDF's Posze agreed, noting that the government will disperse 90 million florints (roughly $1.5 million) among all the parties. No outside fund-raising or donations from foreign entities will be allowed. Among other things, that means Hungarian campaign managers won't have to concern themselves with blitzes of negative TV ads, tarmac press conferences, or targeted interest group mailings.

I hadn't thought of that. So what, I asked Levay, would be useful? "In Hungary wall placards are important," he said. "We can put them up, it's cheap, we can see that the other guys don't tear them down. How to make nice ones would be good to hear. We use very bad techniques now." Others agreed: give us your leaflet technology and campaign-organization manuals; keep your theorizing about the effects of Super Tuesday. When I asked Varga of the Social Democrats what had been most useful for him, he brightened and pulled out a small slip of paper. "This is *good*," he said through USIA interpreter Eva Baer. "This" was a sample ballot that showed Democrats how to vote the straight ticket.

After a mall blitz (notable purchases: Komlos bought a bottle of "Lady Stetson" cologne; Mozsi got a rubber tarantula), we went to polling places and get-out-the-vote centers. Back on board we discussed victory parties ("We understand that everybody is drunk by the first half hour, slapping each other on the back and telling each other how good they are") and Hungarian voter apathy. This was another surprise. I had assumed the entire nation is running around—Komlos-like, East Germany-like—huzzahing for democracy. But all hands agreed that the vast majority of Hungarians, dulled by 40 years of compulsory voting for Communist candi-

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dates, consider elections a nuisance. Even now. "People come home from work," Levay said, "and they only want to listen to music videos. Michael Jackson. And if you knock on their door they say"—here he grimaced and bulged his eyes—"Do not bother me!" On the topic of negative campaigning, all concurred that it will be used "plenty" against the Communists. Opinions differed on whether the opposition parties will rip one another when push comes to shove. Posze said a spirit of cooperation will reign. Levay, ever the hardballer, said, "Non-idealistically speaking, we will."

As for Coleman mania, it dissipated nicely. Partly because the group had met Wilder in Charlottesville and (I'm told) found him smart and charming. Partly because we went back to the hotel around 6 p.m. and felt exciting vibes as exit polls predicted (wrongly) an easy Wilder win. And partly because of Coleman's style. During a pre-party dinner, Levay said Hungarians dislike strident speakers. "If you attack someone too sharp—'You are lying! You ruined the whole country!'—people think you are trying to hide something with your voice. Preferable is a studied manner. Like so." He softened his tone. " 'I hear what you say, but reality shows quite another thing.' " I asked him to sketch the ideal candidate. "Coleman was too emotional," he said. "Wilder was more cool in his fighting. That was good." Then he paused and thought a moment. "But that Dukakis, he was *freezed.* You can't be him."

ALEX HEARD is a frequent contributor.

Taking potshots at public education.

SILBER BULLET

By David P. Hamilton

"Our society is in trouble and we all know it," John Silber thunders in his new book, *Straight Shooting*. As the modest subtitle (*What's Wrong with America and How to Fix It*) suggests, the president of Boston University isn't about to sit on his hands while civilization collapses around him. His laboratory is the Boston suburb of Chelsea, whose school committee agreed last summer to hand BU near total control of its school district for ten years. The project is more than one of the most ambitious educational reforms ever attempted: it's social engineering on a grand scale, an attempt to revitalize a depressed community by expanding the role of public education in public life.

The university is often hailed as Chelsea's last hope, and a quick look at the city explains why. Chelsea's population is hardly more than half what it was 30 years ago, thanks mainly to an exodus of its original population of white ethnic immigrants. The smaller tax base and an influx of immigrants from the poorer nations of Latin America and Southeast Asia have sapped the city's social resources. More than 28 percent of Chelsea families are headed by single parents, and nearly a third of the population receives state or federal welfare assistance. Tight budgets and fierce patronage politics have made education a low municipal priority. Chelsea teachers earn an average of $26,300, $4,000 less than the state average. The district's newest school dates from 1910. Less than half of Chelsea's ninth-graders passed state-mandated tests of reading, writing, and math skills last year (statewide, 79 percent passed). Most students (52 percent) never complete high school. The city has a teenage pregnancy rate of 14 percent, one of the highest in the state.

BU's plans for Chelsea aren't entirely new. Many elements are straight out of "America and the Underclass," a paper Silber wrote in 1965 while a professor at the University of Texas. (It's been included with minor changes as a chapter in *Straight Shooting*.) The core idea is to extend traditional public education into social work. In Chelsea, BU is planning "family schools," which will offer students and their parents vocational and literacy education, health and nutrition programs, and day care (by extending the school day and year), as well as "moral education." If family schools work as advertised, they should turn out well-fed, healthy students who study hard, stay off drugs, and internalize the Protestant work ethic while their parents are learning English, job skills, and family responsibility.

The specifics of the BU plan are generally impressive. Teachers and trained tutors will use "individual learning plans" to give students personal attention and to make sure they're not falling behind. Inspired by the success of Head Start (a program Silber advised at its inception 25 years ago), BU intends to start primary school for all students at age three, mainly so that non-English-speaking children have a chance to begin first grade without a language disadvantage. (Chelsea's Hispanic coalition has filed suit against the project, claiming that BU will "destroy bilingual education.") The university is also standardizing the K-12 curriculum across the school system and implementing benchmark learning goals for each grade, reviewing the district's textbook selection criteria (presumably with an eye to obtaining more substantive texts), and devising a system for teacher evaluation (which must meet the approval of the teachers' union).

Over the next ten years, BU hopes, not only will the quality of education in Chelsea dramatically improve; new residents and businesses will move in, expanding the city's tax base to the point where the schools can be self-sustaining. For the Chelsea project isn't cheap: Dean of Education Peter Greer, its nominal leader (Silber is clearly the real driving force), estimates that the university will need to raise $30 million to

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$40 million from public and private sources to fund the project for the next ten years. The university's willingness to back up its plans with much-needed cash—Chelsea's education budget will grow by nearly 30 percent—has quieted many of the project's critics and won Silber wide acclaim as a visionary ready and able to save public education from itself.

But hold the applause. Suppose everything works as planned, and by the year 2000 Chelsea is transformed into "a real bedroom community," as Greer puts it. What then? How exactly will the Chelsea Effect be replicated around the nation? It is here that things get tricky.

Encouraging the adoption of every lousy school district by a benevolent university is probably not a good idea. Even Silber isn't eager to make this a trend, although his objection derives largely from institutional pride: "I think there are a very large number of universities that define the problem rather than the solution. . . . Boston University's School of Education is not typical." That doesn't mean Silber has any qualms about establishing an autocracy in the management of school districts, just that he's more comfortable when he's in charge.

But some qualms would be in order. The Chelsea project is already a bit unsettling as a precedent in privatizing the making of public school policy. BU is theoretically accountable to the public because it can be fired by a majority vote of Chelsea's school committee. But in order to do so, the board has to be willing to see the school budget shrink by the 30 percent that BU is chipping in—a strong disincentive for disputing any but the most unpalatable BU decisions.

This means, among other things, that Silber is fairly free to impose his own moral agenda on the Chelsea community. BU describes its emphasis on "moral education" innocently enough, as a program for teaching students and parents respect, courage, empathy, and integrity. Only wild-eyed cultural radicals could object to these values—but how do we know that Silber will stop there, when controversial subjects such as political history and sex education are available for moral dissection? In *Straight Shooting*, he depicts moral principles as leading inevitably to practical choices, such as when he grinds through a tedious moral calculus to pronounce abortion immoral. Will the Chelsea schools teach unwed pregnant teenagers that abortion is immoral? In the new Chelsea school district, there's ultimately only one opinion that really counts—John Silber's. "Moral education" could well become a euphemism for instruction in his particular brand of moral conservatism.

If privatization won't be the moral of the Chelsea story, maybe the lesson will be to give school superintendents as much policy-making autonomy as BU now has. This seems to be largely what Silber has in mind. One of his explicit goals is to "educate" the Chelsea school board so that it makes only "general policy" and leaves all other decisions to the appointed superintendent. Even if Silber takes this basic concept too far (asked to elaborate on "general policy," he mentioned posing to the school board difficult questions like "Do you want good schools, do you want bad schools?"), leaving district administration to educational professionals only makes sense. But as Michigan State University education professor Richard Elmore has pointed out, the majority of American districts already have strong superintendents who minimize the policy role of school boards—and in most cases, the schools still aren't very good. Silber chooses not to see this. His long-running feud with the Boston school district seems to have left him convinced that school boards are only meddling, politicized bodies that interfere with educational policy too often for their own good.

In the end, the only value that BU's experiment is likely to have beyond the confines of Chelsea is to demonstrate the results, good or bad, of the comprehensive educational program that the university is implementing. But even here, few of the ideas are really new; indeed, many of the elements are long-standing components of the liberal education agenda. The only reason they haven't been implemented is that they cost real money, a point Silber—who at heart is a conservative, notwithstanding his hybrid reform program—likes to play down. "We must dispel the myth that we can improve our educational system simply by spending more money on it," he writes in *Straight Shooting*. Meanwhile, in Chelsea, BU is trying to improve the educational system by spending more money on it.

Actually, Silber's argument is a bit more subtle. He doesn't oppose money per se. But he thinks the huge urban districts like Boston have plenty of money that's badly spent. And, like other conservatives, he says that state and federal education aid is often wasted, since distant bureaucrats are unlikely to spend money as wisely as local officials—although his ideological convictions didn't stop him from seeking a state grant for $3.5 million, or from complaining about a lack of funds when the grant fell victim to the Massachusetts fiscal crisis. Even if he won't admit it, Silber seems to realize that the money to improve education in poor districts can't come from anywhere *but* big government, since the districts themselves are by definition in no shape to provide it.

Greer suggests that communities can raise money from businesses and individual philanthropists—a fine idea, if your community is rich. But in Chelsea, BU's fund-raising efforts are lagging—of the $3.5 million sought by the university for the program's first year, only $850,000 has been raised so far, and only $250,000 of that from individuals and businesses in Chelsea. Other poor districts aren't likely to find great untapped pools of cash lying around in their vicinity either.

In the end, the Chelsea project may serve mainly to vindicate the long-standing liberal insistence that good education in poor districts requires money from sources beyond the local level. If so, it will have been a worthwhile experiment, though not in the way Silber intended. •

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Feeling low at the Higher School.

POOPED PARTY

By S. Frederick Starr

The Higher Party School in Moscow is to the Communist Party what the Pontifical Institute in Rome is to the Catholic Church. Since Lenin's day it has been codifying the Communist faith and passing it on to new generations of leaders. So when the scholars of the Higher Party School assembled on September 5 to debate "The Party and Perestroika," it was an event worth noting. The meeting was confidential, but a stenographer was there to record the proceedings. Several participants were stunned by what they heard and slipped a typescript to interested persons. The text reveals that in the course of a few brief hours the Higher Party School all but declared bankruptcy.

The professors gathered amid profound gloom. An economist estimated that it will take the U.S.S.R. 300 years to catch up with the United States in manufacturing and 600 years in agriculture. Professor Kuleshov, a department chairman, spoke of maternity hospitals without showers and toilets, clinics without medicine, and shops without goods. "I believe a worker [who sees all this] will not want to play around with definitions of 'capitalism' and 'socialism,' " he declared. "He wants to live in a society where people live well, regardless of what it calls itself. [He wants] a high standard of living, a degree of social justice, democracy, and humane social relations. I doubt there is even one person in this hall who would be so bold as to claim these exist in our country."

The mood of crisis was general, but it focused particularly on the Communist Party itself. One scholar spoke of "ritualized elections," another railed against the Party's "totalitarian structure," and still another denounced Soviet communism as "a social mutant with many absurd and illogical structures." Secretive in its operations and closed to public scrutiny, the Party "is not, strictly speaking, a political organization at all," announced the school's rector, V. N. Shostakovsky. Speaker after speaker zeroed in on the Party's administrative apparatus. Rigid and inflexible, this vast bureaucracy serves not the people but itself; any ties with society are purely one-directional, from the top down.

Perhaps, it was suggested, this isn't surprising, given what the Party has to work with. The rector observed, "If one speaks of the type of [person who becomes a] Communist, about the typical member of our organization, then one must acknowledge that . . . most are conformists . . . ill-disposed to independence or nonconformity, disinclined to criticize the leadership, lacking in initiative, etc." Such people, he said, are incapable of participating in a democracy.

The chairman of the "Department of Scientific Communism" added a devastating historical dimension. Down to the 1917 revolution, he argued, the Bolsheviks were an illegal conspiratorial group with no notion at all of true democracy. Lenin's task after 1917 was to transform this band of professional revolutionaries into a democratic party. But as this early *perestroika* failed, Lenin turned not to democracy but to the Chekha, the notorious secret police. How can this anti-democratic failed reformer continue in his traditional role as national icon?

Looming over this grim party was the memory of untold numbers of monstrous crimes, the full extent of which are only now becoming known to the Soviet public. Who bears responsibility for this barbarism? The professors at the Higher Party School heard their rector draw a comparison between the U.S.S.R. and Hitler's Germany. He went on to quote Karl Jaspers in defense of the proposition that only by assuming full "metaphysical responsibility" for Stalin's crimes can today's Party hope to take responsibility also for the fate of *perestroika*.

These are hardly the views one would expect from a senior official of a political party facing possible humiliation at the polls in a few weeks. But the savage candor continued, with a young docent arguing that "if the people refuse to trust us, we have obviously earned it." Lest there be any doubt that disaster lies just around the corner, the vice rector, N. M. Blinov, brought forward a recent survey showing that no more than five percent of voters would support candidates backed by the Party bureaucracy (as opposed to party reformers), and that Communists stand to be thrown out of office in two-thirds of the large cities of the U.S.S.R.

But what about Article VI of the Soviet Constitution, which guarantees the Communist Party's "leading role" in Soviet society, come what may? The rector assured his audience that today no mere law can guarantee a role for the Party. A professor of industrial organization noted: "The experience of other socialist countries shows that if the Communist Party tries to preserve [its privileges] it will lose its leading role entirely."

Speaker after speaker took the podium to lay out a path by which the Party could draw back from the brink. All called for an overhaul of the system, so that it might actually reflect the views of workers. In planning this overhaul, the professors seemed to be guided not by Marx and Lenin, but by Max Weber, Talcott Parsons, and Claude Lévi-Strauss, all of whom they cited by name. The rector himself clinched an argument in favor of diversity of opinion by invoking the authority of "the American founding fathers."

In defending their proposals, several speakers conjured up likely scenarios. V. I. Mitrokhin, secretary of the Institute's Party Committee, saw five possibilities: the breakup of the Soviet Union into several dozen fully independent states; a federal system granting each republic much control over its own fate; a humane form of

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socialism that "out of political considerations" would not call itself either communist or socialist; capitalism; or some combination of the above. Others posed the choice between driving the "radical" followers of Andrei Sakharov and Boris Yeltsin out of the Party or expelling the Party's traditionalist staff, the infamous "*apparat*." No speaker accepted the radicals' seemingly unqualified embrace of individual interests as opposed to communal interests. Yet virtually all of them, including several who submitted their statements in writing after the meeting, embraced the rest of the radical program, including a multiparty system.

But what about the middle ground, where Gorbachev himself stands? As L. M. Ovrutsky, identified only as a "publicist," put it: "The field of maneuver between the conservative *apparat* and the radicalizing masses of Party members is shrinking." In other words, the U.S.S.R. may soon have to choose between radicals and conservatives.

Many speakers called for full democratization, which led them to try to define just what that would mean. On many points, there was a surprising amount of agreement. "Bottom up" democracy requires protection of minority rights; after all, the rector reasoned, minority views are often "the most constructive and bold." All wanted to throw the *apparat* out of the Party. (Even though, as Ovrutsky acknowledged, this could give rise to a separate party of neo-Stalinists and anti-Semites. The platform for such a party "already exists," he warned without elaborating.) Once emancipated from its own bureaucracy, the Communist Party will then be free to pull back from day-to-day supervision of the government and of the economy. The speakers argued that it is the failure of the economy above all that is driving workers away from communism, and this failure can be traced directly to oafish meddling by Party bureaucrats, who have killed competition and destroyed the market mechanism.

The importance and inevitability of political pluralism was virtually taken for granted. Gorbachev has struggled to confine the emerging pluralism to the Communist Party, but, as several speakers agreed, this is no longer possible. Other parties already exist, de facto if not de jure. A department head named I. A. Malmygin lamely proposed that the Communist Party divide itself into three new parties, red, orange, and green, and then close up shop. Not one speaker held out hope that the U.S.S.R. could remain a one-party system.

This is precisely the point at which these solid members of the *nomenklatura* revealed their sympathy for the radicalism of Yeltsin and Sakharov. As Shostakovsky put it, one-party rule condemns the monopolist party to stagnation; the only way the Communist Party can now revitalize itself is through the stimulation that comes from competition.

Virtually every speaker understood that the U.S.S.R. is groping toward becoming a "civil society" even though, as the rector acknowledged, the very idea of civil society remains terra incognita for many Russians. The tempo of change is rising, however. The sole future for the Communist Party, he asserted, is to become "one of the bridges between civil society and the state." So much for Lenin's heritage.

What bearing does this feast of iconoclasm have on Gorbachev's reforms? Many speakers professed their support for *perestroika* and Gorbachev. At the least, they are willing to back him against the Party's own bureaucrats. However, the clear thrust of the entire exchange at the Higher Party School was criticism of Gorbachev on grounds that he lags behind the sentiments and needs of an increasingly democratic society.

One speaker petulantly criticized Western writers for speaking of "Gorbachev's new thinking," when in fact nearly all his ideas have been borrowed from others, and reluctantly at that. Dr. I. M. Kliamkin, a guest from a related institute, ripped into Gorbachev on more fundamental grounds. Citing chapter and verse from Gorbachev's speeches, he attacked the leader's unwillingness to disengage the Party fully from the economy; if full disengagement is a "false thesis," as Gorbachev claims, then "all talk of democratization is empty words." Kliamkin also criticized Gorbachev's contention that private property is "unacceptable" in the U.S.S.R.; if so, the country will never have efficient light industries or a functioning service sector. Above all, Kliamkin took aim at Gorbachev's opposition to a multiparty system, claiming that the president's position on this was more appropriate to the 20th (i.e., Stalin's) century than to the 21st.

It is hard to convey in a few lines the mood of desperation that emanates from the stenographic report of this discussion. The rector set the tone at the beginning when he noted that "we fear terms like 'political pluralism,' 'private property,' and 'confederation,' but for some reason we don't fear the collapse of the economy, crime waves, and moral erosion; nor do we fear the fact that everyone lives badly in our society except speculators and thieves." From this point it was downhill all the way. N. I. Travkin, a deputy to the new congress, warned that "we are talking about the preservation in this country of a Communist Party as such. Will it justify itself or not?"

Toward the end of this solemn conclave of professors, an elderly doorkeeper named Claudia Timofeeva asked for the floor. She explained that she is a simple worker, far from the world of learning. But she is loyal to the Party, which she joined in 1942. She had listened with interest to all the talk of how the Party should evolve. But the plain truth, she asserted, is that "the Party today has lost its authority. You hear this on every street corner."

Presumably, the purpose of the meeting at the Higher Party School was to reverse the erosion she described, to help the Party regain its authority. As news gets out on what was actually said, though, Party loyalists in Donetsk, Minsk, or Novosibirsk must surely feel abandoned. But by then maybe no one will care.

S. FREDERICK STARR is the president of Oberlin College.

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The Mad Max mood of Moscow.

PUNK PERESTROIKA

By Martin Walker

Soviet intellectuals have a taste for the melodramatic, and they have learned that their worst fears have a nasty way of coming true. Anyone who has lived in Moscow knows about the wonderfully depressing conversations around kitchen tables that last through the night. Muscovites have been predicting civil war for years. But the mood now is extraordinary even by Soviet standards—fatalistic and epic and apocalyptic all at once.

The contrast between the evidence of reformist achievement and the degree of public gloom is somewhat surreal. On the TV screens, Gorbachev greets Orthodox Church elders after letting them conduct the first religious service in a Kremlin cathedral in over 70 years. Marvelous, says the visitor. Sure, grunt Russian friends, but did you know there would be food riots this winter, and that there was a secret plan to introduce rationing after New Year's? KGB generals dressed cozily in civilian clothes chuckle and grimace their way through a phone-in program. Look at that, the visitor says. Yes, but did you know about Tatyana Novodvorskaya of the Democratic Front, now on her tenth 15-day "administrative" jail term since last May?

When I lived in Moscow, from 1984 until last August, the Hotel Oktyabraskaya was like the forbidden city. Surrounded by fences and brick guard posts, it was the Party hotel, reserved for guests of the Central Committee. We ordinary mortals could but stare and wonder as the vast electric gates purred to seal us out. There were legends about its marble floors and dining rooms where bills were never presented. Last month I finally saw it from within, when a group of journalists, invited to an International Press Institute conference hosted by the Soviets, was put up there.

Our meeting took place in a conference room so grand we should have been signing the Treaty of Versailles. The 60-foot ceiling contained so many crystal chandeliers that the antiquated Soviet TV cameras needed no extra light. My room was slightly more modest. With its dark wood paneling and heavy furniture, it resembled the 1950s Des Moines hotel where Khrushchev had stayed. But the TV and short-wave radio and the refrigerator all worked. There was a separate shower with two water jets, a big bath and thick towels, and curtains that actually met and kept the light out. Same-day laundry and dry cleaning. Free haircuts. And a real treasure trove—courtesy tubes of Soviet shampoo and shaving cream and toothpaste. None of my Russian friends had seen Soviet toothpaste for months. I carried the tube around in my pocket to show people. It was like a religious relic. Touch and believe.

Capitalism has invaded this Party sanctum. Certainly I could stay on here for a couple of days after the conference ended, I was told. But then came a discreet cough—that would be $300 for two nights, cash in advance. This was enough of an incentive to sample the delights of Gorbachev's free market. You can now hire your own room or sublet a Soviet flat, terms strictly cash. No passport, no papers, no names. (You can rent Soviet cars too, and drive around without the telltale licence plates that disclose whether you are a diplomat, a journalist, or a businessman, and which country you come from. Anonymity in Moscow spy fiction will never be the same.) I soon discovered that for a minimum three-day stay, I could have anything from a clean spare room in a Russian family home at 15 rubles a night to a large and luxuriously appointed apartment at 75 rubles—about four bucks at the black-market rate.

This was a heady experience for an old Moscow hand. As soon as I arrived, I started asking people about the hot new exhibitions, the plays and films we must see, the articles we had to read. My Russian friends looked at me oddly. I was still living in early *glasnost*. The read-everything craze is over. *Pravda*'s circulation of 11 million will be halved this year, and not simply because it is perceived as a conservative rag. Subscriptions to the radical *Izvestia* have dropped about 25 percent. Even subscriptions to *Argumenti i Fakti* are reportedly down after last year's extraordinary surge to 23 million. The only publications to show a rise in next year's orders are *Semya* (Family), which is cannily serializing the first Soviet sex manual, and *Asia and Africa Today*, which is presenting a teach-yourself kung fu course.

We are into post-modernist *perestroika*, and the one thing that everyone has read is Sasha Kabakov's novella *The Man Who Would Not Come Back*. It is a devastating

continued on page 26

MARTIN WALKER is a Washington correspondent for the *Guardian* of London.

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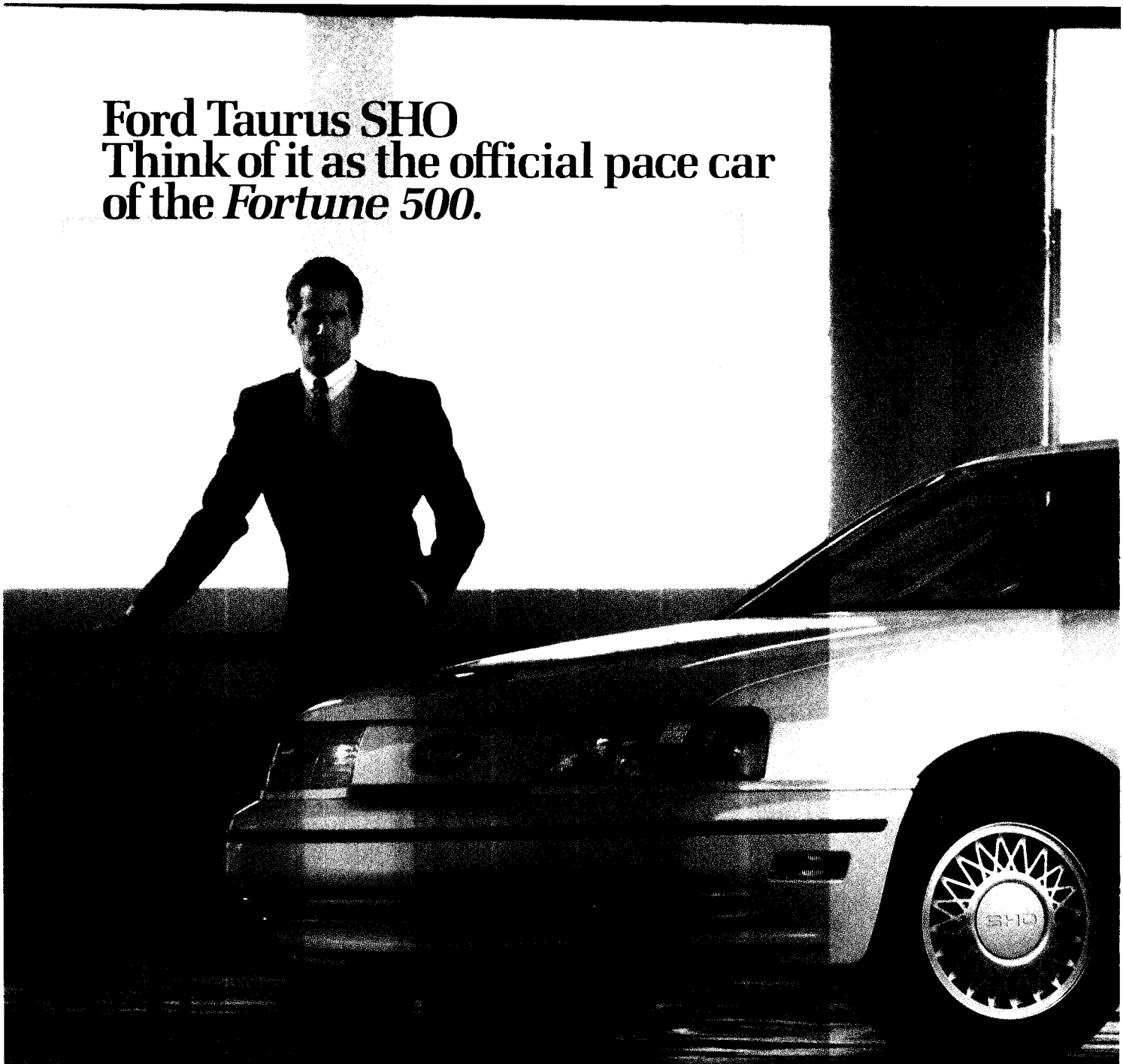

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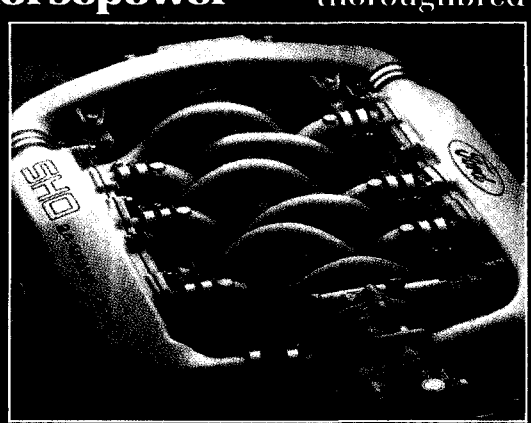

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political satire thinly disguised as a sci-fi yarn. Our hero can travel through time, so a nervous KGB bullies him into zooming ahead to 1993 to see how *perestroika* turns out. What he finds makes Beirut look like Club Med. The only remnant of *perestroika* after the civil war of 1991 is the money, called Gorbatti, but you have to use ration coupons anyway. The new leader is a General Pamayev, who goes everywhere inside a tank (his gasoline-starved escort rides a horse).

Late at night in the Hotel Oktyabraskaya, with the TV set blaring out that day's stirring debates about a new press freedom law in the Supreme Soviet, I read Kabakov's book. Kalashnikov was escorting a woman through the rubble, looking to buy some shoes. Jews were being smoked out of blown-up apartments. The punks were scouring the city for Metallisti, heavy metal rock fans, and the Leveling Committee was raiding the apartments of bureaucrats and black marketeers. It was Mad Max goes to Moscow.

This is all people want to talk about. How did I like that scene where the body of the Metallist is seen hanging from the balcony of the Hotel Pekin? Did I know that Kabakov's point was that the hero was right to stay in the grim future rather than return to Moscow of 1989, where the KGB still ruled? That Kabakov had said this on the trendy TV talk show "Vzglyad" and had been censored? Did I know he was selling the film rights for millions? I had dinner with Kabakov in one of our old haunts, the Chinese co-op restaurant Mei Hua, and asked about his new fame. "I'd only do one thing differently if I wrote it again now," he said. "I'd bring it all forward to 1991. It ain't going to last till '93."

Whenever Soviet conversations ramble round to the prospect of a coup, and these days they usually do, nobody mentions the conventional military scenario of the Taman Guards Division ramming armored personnel carriers through the Spassky gate into the Kremlin. Nor does anybody propose the Politburo as the likely forum. The optimists suggest that the new Supreme Soviet might yet become the kind of body that could bring down the government with a vote of no confidence. The pessimists, who tend to be people who have actually read a bit of Lenin, look to the working class.

It is only 25 years since the Soviet Union had a political coup, with the fall of Nikita Khrushchev in October 1964. In the anniversary week, *Moskovskaya Pravda* ran a full-page article asking bluntly whether it could happen again. The author concluded that he thought not, but that a kind of revolution was possible. He went back to Lenin to cite the three connected preconditions: the rising popular discontent, usually focused on a fall in living standards; a crisis of authority at the top of the government machine; and "a significant increase in the activity of the masses, leading to their chance to play an independent role on the stage of history."

The masses are not yet stomping on stage, but we do not need a front-row seat to hear their noises in the wings. For thoughtful Soviets, the most alarming sign of working-class discontent was not the summer miners' strikes, but the autumn slowdown of the railway workers. The government responded to the strikes with some urgent purchases in Western Europe of women's tights and toothpaste and tape cassettes and soap and prepared foods. Most of this stuff has been rotting at the docks for weeks. The railway workers are not striking, because the new law says they may not. But they are working slowly, and obeying every minor safety regulation in order to get the same special treatment that the miners won, and this is proving hugely disruptive.

It is the slowdown that is responsible for the very real threat of fuel shortages this winter. The Soviet transport system is utterly dependent upon its railways. This is not an economy that goes by road. Indeed, the main route between Moscow and Leningrad degenerates in places to a narrow two-track road that passes through tiny villages where chickens and the odd pig may waddle across the highway.

So when the railway workers let the leadership know that they too want extra soap and sausage, the whole economy trembles. And this is the irony of Gorbachev's *perestroika*: it now faces the sullen resistance of the world's last true industrial proletariat, preserved as if in aspic by the inefficiencies of the command economy. On the docks and down in the pits, in the steel plants and on the railways, the horny-handed sons of toil still exist in exploited millions in this museum of an economy, and they are starting to feel their power.

This is what lies behind the current debate in *Literaturnaya Gazeta* between Democracy and Autocracy. The question is whether supreme power should be vested in Gorbachev today, in order that *perestroika* and democratization can be preserved in the future. The argument stipulates that by stressing *glasnost* and political liberalization, and ducking the tough economic reforms, Gorbachev got it backward. He should have dismantled the price controls and dropped the food subsidies and started to make the ruble convertible back in 1986, when the command economy and the traditional political deference were still in place. Today, if he tries to introduce belt-tightening measures, he faces the fast-organizing opposition of the Workers' Fronts.

The movement seems to have begun with the beleaguered Russians who live in the Baltic republics. Then the traditional trade unions, encouraged by Party conservatives, came into the act. The argument is simple: the Russian working class should not have to pay the price of correcting the Party's mistakes just because some Moscow intellectuals say so. In practice, this meant that we heard little from these people and their growing number of sympathetic deputies in the Supreme Soviet debates on the crucial issue of the new law to ban or curtail the right to strike. They saved their firepower to attack the new cooperatives and their high profit margins, and to condemn any suggestion of wage freezes.

This is the new populism, and it is doubly dangerous. On the one hand it is becoming a stubborn force of resistance to the economic reform the system so desperately needs. On the other hand it is volatile in its loyalties and its hatreds. When Ivan Ivanovitch on the

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Kirov Street omnibus talks about the cooperatives and the speculators, he adds the adjective "Jewish." The anti-intellectual tone of populist discussion carries similar overtones. For some years now one popular (and false) nickname for the much-disliked Raisa Gorbachev has been "Yevreyka," the Jewess. And in *Nash Sovremmenik* and *Molodaya Gvardia*, the house magazines of populist Russian nationalism, the anti-Semitism is as naked as the deep suspicion of all these reforms. Indeed, one recent article in *Nash Sovremmenik* suggested that all this upheaval was another phase in the long plot by "the clever nation of little people" to undermine the big people. Titled "Russophobia," the article perfectly caught the aggrieved tone of so many Russians these days as the other peoples of the Soviet empire are finally saying what they think of Moscow rule.

One evening I sat in a cozy Jewish restaurant called U Iosefa (Joseph's Place), enjoying some gefilte fish and listening to the best skat blues I had heard for a long time. Over a glass of Georgian wine, Joseph handed me a copy of a newspaper I never dreamed I'd ever see, the *Soviet-Jewish Cultural Chronicle*. The next day I chatted with its editor, who goes by the magnificent name of Tankred Golenpolski. He showed me an open letter to Gorbachev in the next issue, complaining of the dangerous rise in anti-Semitism. He had sent one of his reporters to infiltrate Pamyat, a rather ridiculous organization of extreme Russian nationalists who affect black shirts and mystic drivel about Moscow as a Third Rome, but who are very serious indeed about the Jews. The new minimum requirement to join, the reporter discovered, was to deliver the addresses of three Jewish families. There was now serious concern about pogroms, Tankred said conversationally. And did I know about the self-defense units Jews were setting up in various cities?

"Now you understand," said a Jewish friend, when I recounted this. Lev is a Party member who has just pillaged his savings to buy a gun on the black market. (The Afgantsi, the war veterans, brought home a lot of souvenirs.) He had thought of buying a guard dog, but the prices are too high these days and he couldn't get the fresh meat to feed it. He considered spending 1,000 rubles at one of the new "security" co-ops to install a steel door on his apartment, but in the end he decided that would attract too much attention.

The sense of doom and gloom goes very high up. The new deputy prime minister in charge of economic reforms, Leonid Abalkin, went back to his old economics institute last month for a long session with his former colleagues. He ran through the familiar list of crises: the food shortages, the miners' strikes and the slowdowns on the railways, the inflation, the lack of fuel for the winter, the threat of nationalism in the republics, the civil war looming between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the troubles in Eastern Europe, Pamyat and the Jews. "No country in history has ever faced as many problems as now beset our poor land," he mourned. A colleague piped up: "I can think of one. What about Weimar Germany, 1932?" Abalkin replied, "I was hoping you wouldn't bring that up."

No doubt about it, food supplies are the worst I have ever seen. The food section in the GUM department store on Red Square has been closed. In the past, however empty the shops, most people could get some kind of special supply, or *zakaz*, through their place of work: ministry or factory or institute. A few years ago there was still caviar and good sausage in these *zakaz* allocations. Now, because of the spasmodic attempts to whittle down privileges, the staff at formerly well-supplied places like *Pravda* and the state broadcasting service are making do with macaroni.

But the most hair-raising predictions came from friends who are living examples of the biggest consumer boom the country has ever known. In spite of the opinion polls that say most people are worse off under *perestroika*, there is a lot of hot money about. The new cooperatives that produce Western-style clothes and tape cassettes are thriving. The freedom to travel means anyone who can will come back with a Western personal computer, costing $1,500 in New York discount stores; they can easily sell it for up to 40,000 rubles. A $300 video recorder sells for 6,000 rubles. The writers and journalists and academics who find it easy to travel are suddenly finding themselves relatively rich—and rather frightened.

My friend with the gun explained how the soaring crime rate portends the collapse of civilization as we knew it. He and his wife dare not watch the video after Soviet TV stops broadcasting for the night. The hoodlums watch for the telltale flicker on the curtains after 1 a.m., and mark the apartment for a theft. Did I know about the new Mafia, the armed robberies of the co-op restaurants? And had I heard of the taxi hijackings on the airport road, robberies of people coming back from the West with their computers and videos? "I read *Bonfire of the Vanities*, your Western version of Kabakov," Lev went on. "It is very Russian novel, not about New York at all. It is Moscow. All the fear, all those contrasts of rich and poor."

I thought about it. We had been for lunch at the new Finnish-run Savoy hotel, just down the street from the KGB building on Dzerzhinsky Square. It is for foreigners, the aristocrats of hard currency. We had drunk English ale and watched CNN and eaten shrimp sandwiches and paid by credit card. And as we came out I looked across the road at the grim and crowded Pelmenaya, a stand-up canteen where they serve stodgy Siberian dumplings.

And I thought about the Pekin Hotel, where there is now a West German supermarket selling everything from filet steak to health foods. Naturally, it accepts credit cards only, and the Russians on the street silently watch the loaded trolleys being wheeled to the waiting Mercedes. No wonder everyone cited that scene in Kabakov where the Metallist dangles from the Pekin Hotel balcony. My own fantasies turned more to mobs storming the red-brick bastion of the Oktyabraskaya Hotel, symbol of Party privilege and modern-day Winter Palace, where the vast gates and fences guard a large supply of Soviet toothpaste and not much else. •

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Claiming the Throne

A match flares in the darkness and lights up Derek Jacobi's face. He is the Chorus, clad in modern topcoat, and the match is his "muse of fire." Thus begins Kenneth Branagh's film of **Henry V** (Samuel Goldwyn).

And thus begin comparisons—inevitably, virtually invited—with Laurence Olivier's 1944 film. Olivier began with a panoramic shot of Elizabethan London, then focused on the Globe Theater and its bustle. Then out on stage came the costumed Chorus (Leslie Banks, much inferior to Jacobi). Branagh's Chorus throws a huge electrical switch and lights up an empty film studio as he moves through it. (In the whole film he is the only one in modern dress.) Olivier began and continued in the metaphor of theater on film. Branagh—who adapted the play, directed, and stars—makes us understand at once that his medium is film alone and that cinematic means, rather than transmutations of theater, will be his matter.

Olivier's first entrance consisted of sliding his (wonderful) profile into place as the actor waited backstage at the Globe to go on. Branagh's first entrance is as king, not as actor. The great doors of the council chamber open, and the young king is revealed in silhouette against strong backlighting before he walks toward us. The camera deputizes for him, courtiers bowing to it as it passes them. When Henry sits on his throne, we get the briefest glimpse of his face before we see the courtiers again: then we return for our first real look at him. A purely cinematic entrance.

This difference from the earlier film is heightened by the difference in music. William Walton's score for Olivier was good theater music; it could easily be adapted for use in a stage presentation of the play—bits for entrances, exits, battles, and so on. Pat Doyle's score for Branagh is almost continuous. Excellent it is, too, purring or growling along as the actors speak and move, with sustained-note passages—rather than tripping stuff—that serve as support for mood and even for individual speeches. Branagh's rendition of the St. Crispin's Day speech, for instance, would be less stirring without Doyle's music under it. Argue, justly, that Olivier didn't need such support: we must then concede that at least the younger man knew what he needed, got it, and used it well.

Branagh is 28—just Henry's age when he invaded France to press his claim to the French throne. (Olivier was ten years older when he made his film.) Branagh is already recognized in Britain for his theater work, much of it in Shakespeare, including *Henry V*. He has been seen here in only two films, *High Season* and *A Month in the Country*, but at home he is already sufficiently well known to have published a volume of autobiography, called *Beginning*. Branagh says that he wanted to do a less grand-scale performance than Olivier's, which implies that he could have done the heroic if he chose. Little proof of that here. He is of slight build, somewhat round-shouldered, with a pleasant but undistinguished face. His voice, the sine qua non of any Henry whatever the actor's approach, is a modest modern instrument. Olivier, despite the ticktock rhythms that sometimes nagged the center of long speeches, could magnify and mount, seemed always to be giving the sound mixer all he could handle. Branagh, keenly intelligent but smaller in attack, relies on the sound mixer. His intimate conversations have narrow range and a furry tone. His long trumpet-call speeches seem to find, rather consciously, a few more notes in his voice. They come out more like electoral campaign speeches pleading for support than like kingly inspiration and command.

Branagh, much more than Olivier, implies in his Henry the Prince Hal of *Henry IV*—the roistering prince, companion of Falstaff and company, now grown up. He even includes two flashbacks of tavern scenes from *Henry IV, Part Two* to emphasize this point. His Henry is a down-to-earth type, quite literally. The battle of Agincourt is fought in the rain and mud (Olivier's was broadly sunny), and Branagh doesn't even wear armor (Olivier was fully plated). The muck of reality, as against the pomp of circumstance, is very much the Branagh tone.

This approach is only partly successful because he is the only one in the film to use that tone. All the others play in high Shakespearean form that would have been quite compatible with Olivier's film. Most of them are first-rate—notably Jacobi, Paul Scofield as the King of France, Christopher Ravenscroft as Mountjoy, and Richard Easton as the

FILMS WORTH SEEING

Crimes and Misdemeanors. *Woody Allen's best (though he didn't write quite all of it) deals with morality and the point or pointlessness of life. Good acting, smooth directing. (Reviewed 11/13/89)* **My Left Foot.** *Excellent. Adapted from the autobiography of Christy Brown, the Irish victim of cerebral palsy who wrote and painted with his left foot. No slush. Strength, anger, and, incredibly, fun. Wonderful acting. (11/27/89)* **sex, lies, and videotape.** *Subtle and quasi-mysterious exploration of the sexual ambience in which four young people live. Steven Soderbergh's first film is extraordinary. (9/4/89)* **Yaaba.** *A first film by a native of Burkina Faso about the people among whom he grew up. Life in an African village rendered with simplicity and surprising sophistication. (11/13/89)* **—SK**

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Constable of France. When Henry confronts Mountjoy, they almost seem to be in different time zones.

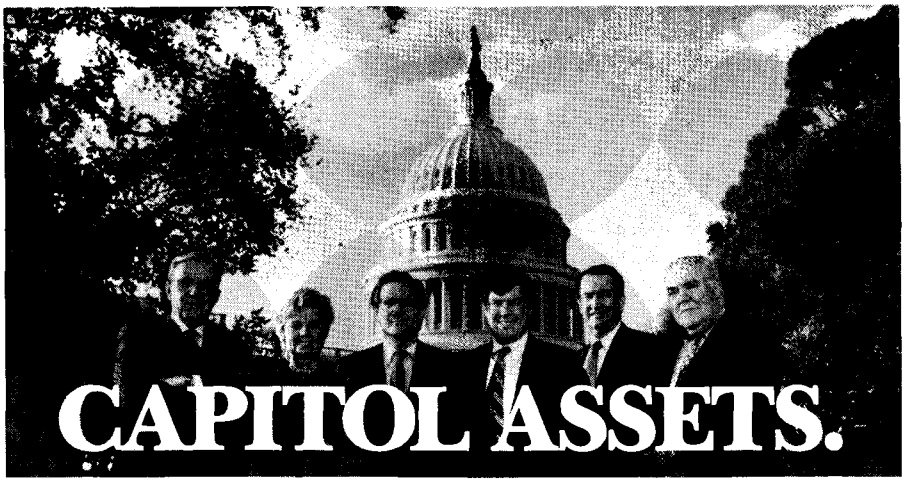
An especial pleasure in Olivier's film were the two scenes with the French princess, played by Renée Asherson. Here she is played by Emma Thompson, who has an exceptionally interesting face and a subtle manner; but she is a highly assured young woman, not a cloistered, shy princess. In the English-lesson scene, I expected her to correct her teacher's pronunciation, and in the wooing scene, I thought she would tell Henry to pull up his socks and get on with it.

The rowdy Eastcheap lot are all flavorful and fine—Geoffrey Hutchins as Nym, Richard Briers as Bardolph, Judi Dench (particularly) as Mistress Quickly. Robert Stephens does well as Pistol, but he labors in the shadow of Robert Newton's performance in the earlier film—absolute perfection, the paradigm of Pistols. When Fluellen comes along, Ian Holm, that treasure among actors, delights us completely. (Robbie Coltrane, Falstaff in the flashbacks, has too little to comment on.)

The text that Branagh uses is notably more complete than Olivier's (though both of course are condensations). The new film includes the three traitors and their fate. Olivier may have felt this material inappropriate to wartime; but he also omitted the incident with Williams and the glove and all but the two first lines of the speech before Harfleur. Branagh at least sketches the glove episode and fulfills the Harfleur speech. The new film also brings before us the hanging of Bardolph for robbing a French church—Shakespeare only mentions it—in order to emphasize Henry's renunciation of his former companions.

As for the besetting trouble of Shakespeare on film—the conflict between a work that lives in its language and a medium that tries to do without language as much as it can—the two films come off about even in dealing with it. Olivier's theater-on-film approach not only avoids the deadliness of a filmed play, it successfully becomes something other than a film—a true mixed-media event. Branagh opts as completely for the cinematic as the work will permit, but despite his limitations as an actor, he never subverts the size and majesty of the play by trying to "modernize" it. He concentrates on trying to render that size and majesty in film terms; and allowing for a few constrictions along the way when the play seems to bump against microphone and camera, he does as well as anyone has ever done in making Shakespeare—not Shakespearean hash—filmic.

Because he is a genuinely gifted director. He has a good eye for cinematic flow that seems to bear language along, as in



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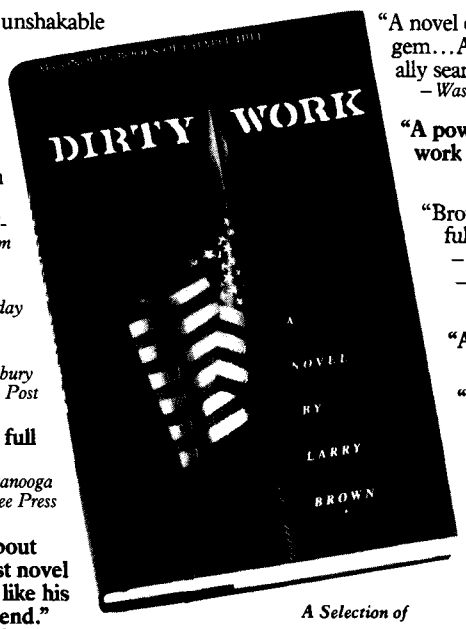

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the scene with the three traitors, and he has an equally good eye for composition that underscores the moment. After Falstaff's death, his saddened companions sit huddled on the narrow stairs of the tavern as they talk about him, and the very picture gives us a sense of bereavement. Here, as everywhere else, Kenneth MacMillan's superbly responsive cinematography is a joy.

Branagh also owes a good deal to his editor, Mike Bradsell, who helped him—among other ways—in making the most of the small armies, nothing like Olivier's crowds of men and horses. Phyllis Dalton's costumes are so good that we never really notice them: they just seem to be the clothes that these people wear.

Olivier's decision to film *Henry V* was plain enough: it was wartime. But why did Branagh choose to do it now? Amid all the publicity guff that Henry is related to Hamlet and the film's pertinence to Vietnam, one comment stands out. Branagh said, "This is the story of an army (the English) who seemingly have no chance, in a state of disrepair and decay, the discipline ragged, and how a young man led them to victory." Possibly he sees an analogy between that army and Britain today and possibly thinks that, through this film, he—a young man—can help quicken morale in a country that is self-confessedly dispirited.

If his assumption about himself seems farfetched (granted that it *is* his assumption), it's not farfetched to see the British film world getting a lift from a young man who not only took on the challenge of adapting, directing, and starring in a Shakespeare film, but challenged comparison by choosing a play that had already been well filmed. On the evidence here Branagh is not yet near Olivier as a classical actor; but as director, as artistic entrepreneur, as sheer charge of film-world energy, he has won his own Agincourt. •

Uncaptive Minds

BY STANISLAW BARANCZAK

The Uses of Adversity: Essays on the Fate of Central Europe by Timothy Garton Ash

(Random House, 352 pp., $19.95)

Coming as it does from *As You Like It*, the title of Timothy Garton Ash's collection of "essays on the fate of Central Europe" seems to define that geographic and spiritual territory as a present-day Forest of Arden, a place where "ugly and venomous" adversity only makes the jewels of embattled values shine brighter. The metaphor is fine, but as wooded areas go, it is Birnam Wood that comes to mind about Eastern Europe, especially for someone who, in the fall of 1989, divides his attention between Garton Ash's book and the latest news on CNN. Today's Central Europe is definitely a forest on the move. It is marching toward whatever Dusinanes are left, and it is marching fast.

The final essay in *The Uses of Adversity* was written in May 1989. Since then so many inconceivable things have happened east of the Elbe that last May feels like the mists of time. Poland ruled by a Solidarity-led government (with the long-vilified Jacek Kurón as one of its ministers); Hungary's Communist Party voluntarily dissolving itself; Baltic republics openly demanding secession; East Germany's momentous opening of the border between the Germanys: had a Shakespearean witch revealed to any political scientist last May that all this would happen by mid-November, he would have sent her promptly back to her caldron.

Has anyone ever heard of a forest that moves? Has anyone ever heard of history taking the tiniest step forward in Eastern and Central Europe, instead of dragging on in circles? But then "What Does the Political Scientist Know?" A poem with that title was written in the early 1980s by the Polish poet Artur Miedzyrzecki. It is worth quoting in full, not least for the pleasure we may derive from the spectacle of yet another poet whose intuition beat the pundits:

What does the political scientist know?
The political scientist knows the latest trends
The current states of affairs
The history of doctrines

What does the political scientist not know?
The political scientist doesn't know about desperation
He doesn't know the game that consists
Of renouncing the game

It doesn't occur to him
That no one knows when
Irrevocable changes may appear
Like an ice-floe's sudden cracks

And that the natural resources
Include knowledge of the venerated laws
Ability to wonder
And a sense of humor

Western political scientists, certainly, but also those who hail from Central Europe or still live there, have generally grown accustomed to the idea of standstill as the natural order of things, of a vicious circle as the emblem of historical time. Central Europe's poets and philosophers, by contrast, have always taught us the imperative of resistance to the status quo. But they have also been cautious enough to warn that the moral obligation to resist should not be confused with hope. To date, the safest bet was not to have any hope at all; to stand up and be counted only because, as another Polish poet, Zbigniew Herbert, put it, keeping "an upright attitude" and thus risking your neck is at least less humiliating than being suffocated in your sleep.

But lately the most irrational dreams (of political freedoms rather than improvements in standards of living) seem to be coming true. In Poland and Hungary and East Germany, people must be bruised all over from pinching themselves every minute. In Czechoslovakia, millions of fingers already twitch in anticipation of their own pinching. I suspect that Garton Ash must be pinching himself, too, even though his brilliant essays, which are in the risky business of political futurology, fare as well as anything written in both the East and West during the past decade.

Garton Ash is the rare political writer who combines the factographic soundness of political science with the intuitive understanding of political journalism, without being enfeebled by the former's literalness or the latter's sensationalism. His previous book, *The Polish Revolution: Solidarity*, splendidly displayed the workings of an inquisitive mind, which reaches far beyond the political event itself, grasping all the complexity of its many contexts, consequences, and self-contradictions. In *The Uses of Adversity*, Garton Ash applies the same ability to a much larger vortex of traditions and visions: this time it's all of Central Europe. And he scrutinizes a much more multifarious and enigmatic historical process than just revolution (even a unique kind of revolution like Solidarity): this time it's "refolution," an unprecedented mixture of revolutionary and reformist

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approaches in Central Europe's transition from totalitarianism to democracy. The words "process" and "transition" should be emphasized, for it is precisely change that concerns Garton Ash; his essays form a chronicle of the consecutive stages of the momentous transformation that has taken place in Central Europe.

To put it succinctly, it has been a transition from As If to In Fact. The principle of As If guided the efforts of the early proponents of a peaceful evolution toward democracy, those who could then still be called "dissidents." (Today the dissident is Husak, who represents a minority in his nation.) Until the emergence of Solidarity in 1980, As If was a moral principle, first and foremost, and a psychotherapeutic device. Tired of a double life, of being stretched between the official lie and the private sense of truth, the dissident tried to live As If he were a free individual in a free country.

It was an act of make-believe; yet in the totalitarian system, whose foundation was pretense, an act of make-believe could have concrete consequences. Persecution, of course. But the tactics of As If also ended up involving both sides in the conflict. It was not only a moral obligation directed to yourself, but also a challenge to the regime: "let's behave As If we were free" had its flip side in "let's behave As If the country's laws were to be taken at their face value, and the authorities were accountable for their actions." From such an apparently naive forthrightness only a short step remains to the creation of an open and organized opposition; and before you know it, empires crumble.

In other words, what has been going on in East-Central Europe over the past decade is the ultimate refutation of the Marxist dogma about material reality determining human consciousness. The reverse turns out to be true. An apparently inconsequential transformation in consciousness, such as the individual's whimsical desire to live in truth, may ultimately topple governments and determine countries' political and economic systems. True, this may take place only where the changing consciousness finds its counterpart in a rapidly declining economy. But an economic crisis, though a necessary precondition for "refolution," is not enough to make it happen. Other, immaterial processes have to be at work.

A good half of Garton Ash's good book is devoted to describing the various degrees that such a transformation of consciousness has reached in different nations of Central Europe over the past decade, from the "inner emigration" of East German intellectuals, to the open yet still solitary moral rebellion of people like Václav Havel in Czechoslovakia, to massive movements pressing for change in Poland or Hungary. But the transformation of collective consciousness in Central Europe seems to proceed with the speed of the marching Birnam Wood only very recently. In fact, it has been a long and arduous process, one that is still far from being completed. And many distractions and dangers lurk along the way, ready to lead the marchers astray or to stop them altogether.

One such danger is what Garton Ash calls "selective memory." Writers like Milan Kundera have popularized the notion of obliteration of memory as the essential feature of totalitarianism. The truth of this notion has been confirmed by the fact that every anti-totalitarian movement in Eastern and Central Europe has started with attempts to restore the nation's historical memory: by revealing some suppressed facts of the past, by creating networks of uncensored information and education, re-establishing ties with specific political and cultural traditions, and so on. But is a resuscitated memory automatically truthful?

In "The Life of Death," one of his finest essays, Garton Ash probes the visual and rhetorical fabric of *Shoah* and *Heimat*—two films dealing, from two different perspectives, with the same dark period in Central European history—to come to a negative conclusion. Obviously memory is always better than amnesia, he writes. But "memory plays tricks. Memory is selective. Memory is partial. Memory is amoral." One only has to recall that one of the first fruits of *glasnost* in the Soviet Union was the emergence of a proto-fascist movement called nothing but Pamyat, or Memory, to understand what Garton Ash has in mind. Individual memory as well as collective memory, even though it undoubtedly makes us more human than the lack thereof, is not always to be trusted as a witness of the past or a guide to the future. A nation does not always profit by a turn toward a forgotten tradition.

This is true also of the tradition of Central Europe. Garton Ash's book does adopt this fashionable notion as a geographic-ethnic-cultural delineation of the area it explores. But it is far from accepting the "Central European myth," as popularized, again, by Milan Kundera, with all the benefit of its often deluding inventory. As Garton Ash points out:

> Kundera's Central Europe is a mirror image of Solzhenitsyn's Russia. Solzhenitsyn says that communism is to Russia as a disease is to the man afflicted by it. Kun-

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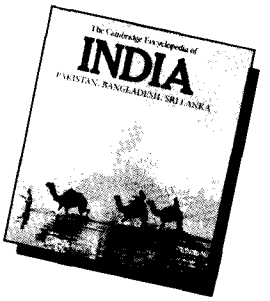

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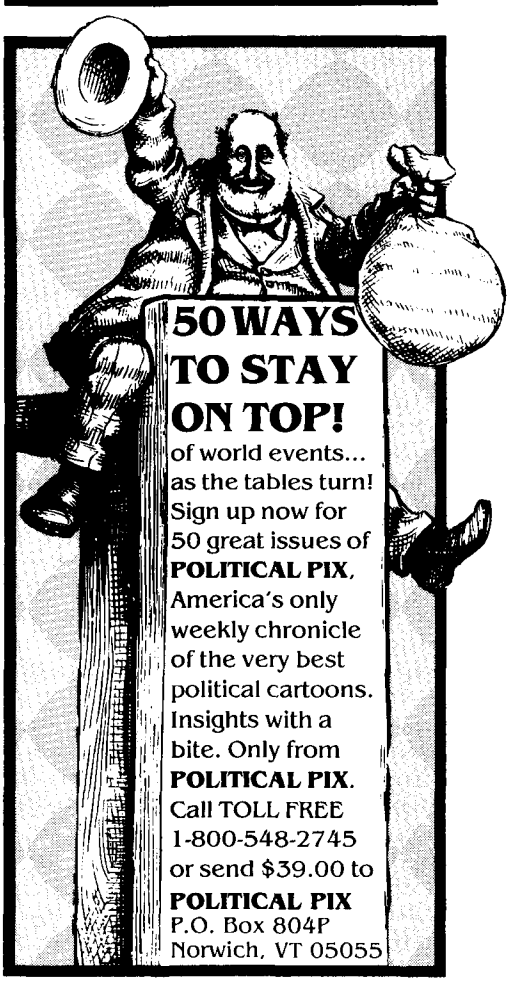

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dera says that communism is to Central Europe as the disease is to the man afflicted by it—*and the disease is Russia!*

Still, even if we are to accept Kundera's "absurd exclusion of Russia from Europe," even if we are to believe that a monolithic Central European tradition is shared from Lublin to Ljubljana and from Vilna to Vienna, we have to realize, Garton Ash argues, that this legacy includes items of very unequal value. It was precisely certain typically Central European attitudes (such as a "superbureaucratic statism and formalistic legalism") that once facilitated the imposition of communism in Hungary and Czechoslovakia.

For Garton Ash, more correctly, the "new Central European idea . . . is not only an assertion about the past" but "also, perhaps mainly, an assertion about the present":

> Put very baldly, the suggestion is that independent intellectuals from this part of the world today find themselves sharing a distinctive set of attitudes, ideas, and values, a set of attitudes they have in common but that is also, to a large degree, peculiar to them. . . . This distinctive set of attitudes has, it is suggested, a good deal to do with their specifically Central European history—for example, the experience of small nations subjected to large empires, the associated tradition of civic commitment from the "intelligentsia," the habit of irony that comes from living in defeat—but above all it has to do with their own direct, common, and unique experience of living under Soviet-type systems since Yalta. . . . Central Europe is not a region whose boundaries you can trace on the map. . . . It is a kingdom of the spirit.

Yet even in this contemporary shape the Central European "set of attitudes" is far from monolithic. Garton Ash compares the political programs of three prominent writers in neighboring countries—Hungary's György Konrád, Czechoslovakia's Václav Havel, and Poland's Adam Michnik—and discovers that the differences overshadow the similarities. What these three have in common is undoubtedly fundamental: their attachment to "antipolitics" (Konrád's term), that is, to being guided by moral principles rather than political opportunism; their emphasis on the idea of civil society based on nonviolent "social self-defense"; and, not least, their contention that world peace cannot be attained unless the political realities of Europe are changed. (In Michnik's words, "The condition for reducing the danger of war is full respect for human rights.") Still, the closer they come to practical precepts on "what is to be done," the more widely these remarkable men differ. And the reason, obviously, is that the concrete political circumstances in their respective homelands are not comparable to each other, "Central Europe" notwithstanding.

The latest developments in Poland and Hungary fully confirm this observation. Faced with the historical opportunity of returning to parliamentary democracy, these two nations have chosen two significantly different paths. Poland grabbed the chance immediately, at the cost of retaining (temporarily, it is silently presumed) several Communists in the government. Hungary prefers to hedge its bets and wait for genuinely free elections, at the risk of the reform losing its momentum. The reason for this divergence lies not in any difference in national temperaments, but in Poland's much more dire economic straits. Solidarity might have seemed smarter had it waited for the Communist government to mess up even more miserably, and finally drop to its knees; but at stake was less Solidarity's image than the country's immediate future. There was an emergency; and so reform required the opposition to take things in its own hands, even at the cost of some political compromises. The protests of radicals inside and outside Solidarity were drowned by the rumble of 35 million Polish stomachs.

This Polish dilemma of the summer of 1989 is an apt illustration of the difficulties that may lie ahead for the countries of Central Europe. Garton Ash's prediction, which sounded bold when he pronounced it in October 1986, seems quite reasonable, even overly cautious, today:

> What is definitely probable . . . is the continuation of a slow, messy, piecemeal process of differentiation in which the peoples of Eastern Europe will gradually, in quite diverse and convoluted ways, come in practice to enjoy more and larger areas of de facto pluralism and independence—cultural, social, economic—areas partly conceded in a planned and deliberate way by their rulers, but mainly wrested from them by *pressure from below*: not the progress of a "reformed" and thus revitalized communism, but the regress of a decaying would-be totalitarianism. The Ottomanization rather than the Finlandization of the Soviet empire.

And yet the dangers inherent in this "emancipation in decay" loom today even larger than they did in 1986. One of the two central themes in Garton Ash's book is the real-life victory in Central Europe of what initially seemed to be just an awakening of collective conscience, a moral revolution. The other is the increasingly nagging question: If and when the moral revolution proves victorious, exactly how moral will it remain? From the early dissidents through the rise of Solidarity, the democratic movements in Central Europe drew their strength from their ethical integrity, listening to the whisper of conscience rather than to the drumbeat of political opportunism. Before 1989, certainly, the choice was relatively easy; there was no real political opportunity in sight. Now opportunities abound. Will the drumbeat drown the whisper? "Antipolitics" was, Garton Ash argues, "a product of living in defeat. How much would survive victory?"

At least in the cases of Poland and Hungary, we may already replace "would survive" with "will survive," but that only makes the question more urgent. In economically ravaged Poland, in particular, the matter has become daily reality for many legendary figures of Solidarity and earlier dissident groups, who now are ministers or legislators. If the economic reform is to take effect, those who recently defended the right to work will soon have to vote for raising the rate of unemployment, by closing down unprofitable enterprises. Those who once taught workers to strike will now have to use all their rhetorical skills to persuade them not to strike. The consensus of the economic strategists seems to be that at least a year of enormous sacrifices is necessary. What happens if during this year the populace's patience reaches its breaking point? Will the Solidarity-led government be perceived by the man in the street as another incarnation of the hated "them," as an apparatus of oppression rather than a genuine representation? Are moral absolutes always compromised by real politics?

Garton Ash was farsighted enough to raise these issues as early as October 1986. At that point, speculating on them was not much more than speculation. Three years later his central and most general question—Will Central European, morally pure "antipolitics" survive its political victory?—remains unanswered. Still, there is a reason for cautious optimism, since so far the course of events in Poland and Hungary has proved most of his specific doubts largely unfounded. In 1986, for instance, Garton Ash noted, with understandable dismay, that the leading proponents of change in Central Europe were handicapped by their "contempt of economics." Now we know that, though that may have been true of writers such as Konrád, Havel, or Michnik, there was in fact a division of labor among the dissidents; there *were* reform-minded experts in economics in Poland, but they weren't sticking their heads out as prominently as the

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human rights activists and political writers. These economists are ministers in Tadeusz Mazowiecki's government, or they are government advisers, and they seem to know what they are doing.

Similarly, the eruption of unbridled nationalism that Garton Ash imagined three years ago as one of the most likely fatal results of Central Europe's liberation has so far not occurred. True, one may quote Cardinal Glemp's infamous homily delivered during the controversy about the Auschwitz convent as evidence to the contrary. Glemp's remarks were certainly the most damaging thing that a Pole could do to the reputation of his country at this moment in its history. There is no question that the cardinal, his gift for gaffes and his oratorical clumsiness aside, has for some time been making more or less deliberate attempts to revive the ultraconservative and chauvinist streak in the Polish mentality.

But the glare of publicity that fell on Glemp's remarks made the Western media overlook the swift and uncompromisingly critical response he received from all the leading mouthpieces of Polish public opinion, from *Gazeta Wyborcza* and the *Solidarnosc* weekly to the Catholic weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny*. And Glemp, while being (most Poles I know would sigh: alas) the highest figure in the Catholic Church's hierarchy, should not be identified with the Polish Church and its community of believers. Most important, he should not be identified with Poland. Last June the Poles expressed their identity rather precisely in the voting booths, when they handed a resounding defeat to two ultraconservative candidates who were personally supported by the Primate and were running against Kurón and Michnik.

I do not mean to suggest that any of the obstacles that Central Europe faces on its way back to democracy should be scanted; economic pitfalls and chauvinistic hatreds will remain a threat for many years to come. But there are, finally, reasons for hope. Today's Central Europe is a place where a spiritual transformation of truly colossal proportions has been taking place for a long time, and is now taking final shape. Trained for many years in the school of adversity, the inhabitants of these parts have learned at least this fundamental lesson: that (in Garton Ash's words) "there are things worth suffering for. There are moral absolutes. Not everything is open to discussion." The first and most difficult step has been made; some of the atomized and passive masses of totalitarian past have become societies again. They have

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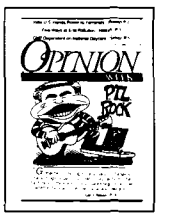

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turned their As If into living fact, winning their wager on history against all odds. They have already recognized and overcome the greatest of evils, which is the evil of doing nothing, of sliding downward into decay. It does not seem probable that they will fail to recognize, and to overcome, other evils, too.

STANISLAW BARANCZAK's collection of poems *The Weight of the Body* has just been published by TriQuarterly/Another Chicago Press.

Reality in America, Cont'd.

BY JACKSON LEARS

The Real Thing: Imitation and Authenticity in American Culture, 1880-1940 by Miles Orvell

(University of North Carolina Press, 382 pp., $37.50, $14.95 paper)

Something strange has happened to the popular sense of reality in modern societies. Though we can never truly know the inner lives of people in the past, it seems likely that for a very long time worries about the palpable presence of the material world were confined to philosophers and mystics: to men like David Hume, for example, who fled from study to billiard room to reassure himself that external reality existed; to brooders who had the time and the inclination to ponder epistemological questions in solipsistic silence. Ordinary folk had too many babies to feed, too many fields to till. They took for granted the press of everyday actuality.

But during the last century and a half, particularly among the most thoroughly industrialized populations of Europe and North America, there has been a subtle shift in the popular consciousness of material reality. The word "reality" has acquired an honorific quality. "Real" has become an adjective of approbation. Six-year-olds (and up) tell their friends to "get real"; critics praise novelists for their "sense of reality"; pundits advise politicians to embrace "the real world"; advertisers claim their products are more "real" than those of their competitors. The idea that reality is a desirable but not always attainable goal has acquired the authority of cliché.

The connotations of the cliché range widely. In common speech, a commitment to reality implies absence of a sentimental idealism, a hard-nosed acceptance of Hobbesian hostilities, a conformity to the commands of everyday routine. Yet it can also suggest an effort to locate some pulsating essence of life that is concealed by business as usual. The suffocating smugness of tough-minded realism can provoke the pursuit of more bracing alternatives. As recently as ten years ago, one could still spy, on warehouse walls in Midwestern university towns, a vestige of the most recent rebellion: the cryptic countercultural graffito "smash reality." There was no question which version the author had in mind.

Despite these occasional skirmishes, over the last 100 years American devotees of the real have developed some common assumptions. Lionel Trilling had them only partly right in his classic essay "Reality in America," written in 1940, in which he summarized the views of the progressive historian Vernon Parrington: "There exists . . . a thing called reality; it is one and immutable, it is wholly external, it is irreducible. Men's minds may waver, but reality is always reliable, always the same, always easily to be known." This summary misses the note of panic behind the insistence on the reliability and the accessibility of reality. There is always the danger that one can refuse to "face reality" or lose touch with it altogether. However it is defined, reality has become the ground of moral being, the framework for deciding questions of ultimate value. The framework is so elastic, however, that the reverence for reality remains virtually empty of ethical, philosophical, or theological content.

How did this complex of attitudes come about? One of the many strengths of Miles Orvell's *The Real Thing* is that he begins to answer that question with some analytical detachment. For too long, historians of American taste chronicled "the rise of realism" in the epic mode. Old Gentility, a well-intentioned but hopelessly stuffy Victorian paterfamilias, commanded the cultural heights until an intrepid band of truth-tellers—the likes of Theodore Dreiser, Hamlin Garland, and Jacob Riis—confronted him with the sordid social facts he had evaded for so long and wrestled him from the pinnacle. Diplomatic historians told a parallel story, about the defeat of Wilsonian idealism (that product of outmoded Victorian values) by tough-minded realpolitik in the post-World War II period. All these accounts were written from inside the temple of reality-worship. Orvell's strength is that he has ventured outside.

By focusing on the persistence of tensions between imitation and authenticity, Orvell escapes the linear "rise of realism" model. Instead he explores the multiplicity of literary, photographic, and architectural forms that could embody the quest for reality, the idiosyncratic ways in which reality could be defined, and the epistemological ambiguities at the heart of those definitions. He also shows the many ways that the pursuit of the real was enmeshed with the development of mass marketing and mass production; it was both a product of those emergent systems and a reaction against them.

Crossing the border between elite culture and popular culture, examining photographs and furniture as well as more traditional literary texts, Orvell summons a wider range of characters than is usually found in discussions of American realism. Alongside canonical figures like Stephen Crane, Alfred Stieglitz, and Frank Lloyd Wright, Orvell presents such acolytes of the real as the designer Gustav Stickley, who inveighed against "dishonest" furniture and styled himself a devotee of William Morris; or the photographer Fred Holland Day, who shot elaborate scenes of Christ crucified, casting himself in the title role. The thread that tied these people together was a sense that "real life" might somehow elude them if they did not capture it and embody it in their work.

In Orvell's view, this pursuit of the real marked a distinct period in our cultural history, between the close of the Civil War years and the onset of World War II. The preoccupation was by no means a constant project, even within this half-century span; the methods varied, the sense of urgency intensified. Whitman was the precursor, protesting the genteel notion that art should be a refuge from the rigors of the common life, creating in *Leaves of Grass* the poetic equivalent of a 19th-century exhibit hall—"a loose, free-flowing, disorganized encyclopedia." As Orvell deftly demonstrates, Whitman articulated the passion for concrete actualities that impelled his more conventional contemporaries to pack

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their parlors with wax daisies, ceramic collies, and stereoscopic views of dark continents.

This imitative aesthetic, this display of mimetic powers, governed literature and photography as well. The artist's job was to reproduce an unproblematic, "one and immutable" reality without calling too much attention to his artifice. It was a tricky business, though. Writers might be able to conceal what Henry James called "the secrets of the kitchen," but for visual artists the effort to create a powerful illusion could require the orchestration of techniques that announced their own virtuosity, as in William Harnett's trompe l'oeil paintings, or effects that seemed obviously staged—as in Day's Crucifixion scenes, which were attacked as much for theatricality as for blasphemy. Extreme mimesis required extreme artifice.

To the writers and the artists coming of age in the 1890s, this sort of contradiction became intolerable. The imitative aesthetic could no longer satisfy their yearnings for reality, which seemed to grow more urgent as the century drew to a close. Nietzsche articulated a sentiment common on both sides of the Atlantic when he wrote that "men of the seventies and eighties . . . were filled with a devouring hunger for reality, but they had the misfortune to confuse this with matter—which is but the hollow and deceptive wrapping of it. Thus they lived perpetually in a wretched, padded, puffed-out world of cotton-wool, cardboard, and tissue-paper."

To set their elders straight, the rising generation ripped the "hollow and deceptive wrapping" from reality. In language, photography, architecture, and design, they attacked the prettifying gesture, the useless ornament, the banal evasion. In part their program was simply a matter of enacting Whitman's prophetic vision—closing the gap between ideals and actualities, admitting the cries of street vendors and starving children into the cotton-wool world of bourgeois culture. In their assaults on the genteel tradition, critics like George Santayana and Van Wyck Brooks spoke for dozens of disgruntled writers, from Frank Norris to Sinclair Lewis, who felt that American literature was evaporating in isolation from "catchpenny realities."

But it soon became apparent that the inclusion of sordid subject matter could not by itself satisfy the hunger for reality. The problem lay deeper, Orvell observes, in the fundamental assumptions underlying the aesthetic of imitation. Within two decades of Norris's turn-of-the century revolt, William Carlos Wil-

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Israel and Human Rights

How does Israel behave in the face of Arab uprising?

The so-called "intifada," the uprising of the Arab population in the territories administered by Israel has been going on for almost two years. In that time, over 500 Arabs and many Israelis have been killed and wounded. Another ever-increasing number of Arabs are being tortured and murdered by their own people—often because of alleged "cooperation" with Israel, but in many cases in order to settle personal scores. The U.S. State Department, in its Report on Human Rights, has been critical of some aspects of Israel's human rights posture.

What are the facts?

■ Israel is a society based on law. Every measure taken by civilian or millitary authorities is scrutinized by the country's legal authorities. In dealing with the "intifada," Israel is faced with a difficult problem—the uprising of a civilian population. This is a problem very similar to that faced by the British in Northern Ireland, by the Filipinos in its southern islands and the Spanish in the Basque provinces. Responsible government has the obligation to maintain order and to preserve law and to do so with as little loss of life and with as little injury to the civilian population as possible.

■ Israel has done just that. The loss of over 500 Arab and Jewish lives is of course a tragedy—every human life is precious. But seen in context, the number of casualties is really very small and a reflection on the care and restraint of the Israeli military. Israeli soldiers are confronted daily with violent riots—massive stonings and fire bombings of persons and moving vehicles, attacks with iron bars, chains, knives, Molotov cocktails and other lethal weapons. Such violence is meant to kill. Israeli soldiers and civilians have lost their lives. Almost 1300 Israelis have been injured, some of them critically.

■ The task of the IDF (Israeli Defense Forces) is made more difficult by the tactics of the Arabs in having their able-bodied adult men stay behind and having their children and their women confront the IDF. It is a no-win situation for the Israelis. They try to avoid death and injury at all cost. But death and injury are sometimes unavoidable in riot situations. Since Israel is an open society, reporters and television crews from all around the world have access to the happenings, quite a few of which are staged for their benefit. Obviously, it is a public relations disaster for the Israelis to have the world see their troops confronting women and children. Those women and children, however, wish to inflect as much damage as they possibly can. They mean to kill.

■ The IDF, one of the finest armies in the world, is trained to defend the country's borders, and not for riot control. Therefore, almost inevitably, errors were made in the initial phases of the uprising. But from the very beginning, detailed instructions were given to the troops on how to react to any given provocation. The orders under which Israeli military personnel operate are specific and well known to every soldier. Those who break the rules are subject to military trial and punishment. The principles of restraint and gradual response are applied. Tear gas is used to control riots. Live bullets are fired only in life-threatening situations. But to some, every means of riot control used by the Israelis, including police batons or rubber or plastic bullets is objectionable.

■ Those residents of the territories who are suspected to have committed serious security offenses are dealt with in full accordance with international law and the humanitarian provisions of the Geneva Conventions. All residents have full access to the Israeli legal system—even to the Israeli Supreme Court. Prisons are unhappy places in every society. But Israeli prisons and detentions centers in which those arrested for security offenses are held, are fully comparable to and adhere to the standards of those in other advanced Western democracies. Certainly, not even the most rebellious Arab detainee in Israel would prefer to serve time in a Syrian, Jordanian, Iraqi or Saudi prison instead.

Within the context of massive human rights abuses throughout the Arab world, the focus on Israel seems to be entirely out of perspective. Other countries in the Middle East lack the most basic elements of human rights—freedom of speech, freedom of the press, free elections, equality for women, freedom of religion, freedom of association. Opponents, instead of facing television cameras, face execution. Those countries do not have to defend themselves against foes who are single-mindedly intent on their destruction. Yet, those nations do not draw the enormous degree of attention that Israel receives. Israel adheres to the highest moral and legal principles. It does so, surrounded though it is by implacable enemies, and consistent with its own security requirements and with its obligation to the international community to maintain law and order in the territories it administers.

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liams was openly rejecting, in 1923, all the "lies" of art, "all the tricks of representation and verisimilitude that stand between people and nature." He demanded "not 'realism' but reality itself." The pursuit of reality was becoming more rigorous and demanding; in the emerging modernist culture, imitation was being supplanted by authenticity as the sine qua non of art.

By the time that Williams delivered his orphic ultimatum, visual artists and designers had already demonstrated the trick to working in the authentic mode: a frank acknowledgment of function and technique, a refusal to conceal one's medium in an excess of illusionism. Stickley and Wright followed the functionalist gospel preached by the architect-prophet Louis Sullivan. Stieglitz, Steichen, and Walker Evans (despite their many differences) rejected pictorialist gimmickry, and used the camera as an instrument for "the verification of fact." Williams, Dos Passos, and James Agee sought to jar the reader into a fuller consciousness of "reality itself" by avoiding conventional poetic diction and larding their language with undigested lumps of anti-poetic material—grocery lists, advertisements, snippets from newspaper stories.

The passion for capturing direct and unmediated experience persisted after the Second World War, but in recent years it has begun to wane. We have passed, in Orvell's scheme of things, from a Victorian culture of imitation through a modernist culture of authenticity to a postmodern culture of the factitious. "We have a hunger for something like authenticity," he writes, "but we are easily satisfied by an ersatz facsimile"—whether the automated Indians at Disney World or the cartoon caricatures of streets and subways sculpted by Red Grooms. Post-structuralist theory offers an intellectual rationale for abandoning quests for authenticity. It is now difficult to find a professor of literature who will refer to reality without inverted commas. Finally Claes Oldenburg's celebration of "an art of cheap plaster and enamel" represents much broader tendencies: an acceptance of surface artifice and a return to the junkyard of 19th-century imitation—always, however, with the mask of irony in place.

The Real Thing is a rich and complex study. It casts new and revealing light on the cultural transformations of the early 20th century. By focusing on the tensions between authenticity and imitation within artistic forms, Orvell provides a new and challenging context for understanding figures too easily subject to formulaic interpretation.

But the details of his argument are more persuasive than its larger contours. The fundamental question—Why?—remains unasked. Referring to early 20th-century advertisers' habit of guaranteeing the reality of their goods, Orvell writes, "It was as if there were some defect in everyday reality that had to be remedied by the more authentic reality of the object to be consumed." Yet he never explores the origins of the imagined defect. The closest he comes is the statement that "the concept of authenticity begins in any society when the possibility of fraud arises, and . . . fraud is at least possible whenever transactions—whether social, political, commercial, or aesthetic—routinely occur, especially when the society becomes so large that one usually deals with strangers, not neighbors." This is fruitful speculation: the rise of an impersonal market-model of human relationships no doubt played an important role in promoting doubts about the trustworthiness of everyday perceptions. But the question of motives could be pushed further, toward an exploration of the anxious yearnings that have often energized the pursuit of reality in modern American culture.

Some roots of that anxiety can only be called religious. Longings for union with the deity, which are universal and timeless, were gradually redefined in the context of American Protestant culture. The immediate spiritual ancestors of Crane and his comrades were the 17th-century Protestants who burned to reignite a core of authentic religious experience beneath the encrustations of ritual. The tendency to equate display and deceit remained a central psychic reflex in many Protestant cultures even after Puritan theology had dissolved into milk-and-water liberalism. Stickley and Sullivan warred on Victorian bric-a-brac with the same fervor (and for some of the same reasons) that early Calvinists had toppled madonnas and smashed stained-glass windows. (European functionalists like Mies van der Rohe or the de Stijl group in Holland, more militant than their American counterparts, were also closer to the springs of Calvinist tradition.)

It is not merely metaphorical to refer to a religion of reality in late 19th- and early 20th-century American culture. Acolytes of authenticity were often God-haunted souls who longed for what Emerson had called "an immediate relation to the universe," but who lacked a language to express their longings. And their particular historical circumstances deepened their sense that they were surrounded by a pasteboard world of deceptive artifice.

As Orvell suggests, the spread of anonymous market relations multiplied possibilities for fraud in everyday social transactions, and the factory system developed the capacity to insulate the affluent from the natural world by surrounding them with imitations of it. Other developments may also have

Postmodern Love

—that faint thin line upon the shore!

Bright fuses, crackling as the surf ripped in,
dynamited along Long Island Sound
where we walked barefoot, cuffs rolled, hand in hand,
watching the die-hard waves, the demolition.
We drove there from our rented basement room
off a garage, where Russian wolfhound pups
cavorted, smearing the whole floor with their crap.
No wonder we feared both leaving and coming home,
slipping past, when the elegant borzois rutted.
The two of us? Entangled and glistening,
she came, once, with a surge, a charge. The thing
that made her moan, she later on admitted,
was thinking of a woman, a dirty blonde
she met for lunch but never dared to touch.
And that was love's high-tide mark at the beach,
I thought, a line of seaweed, shells, black sand.

JOHN DRURY

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deepened the desire for more authentic forms of expression: the increasing flamboyance of the wealthiest Americans, the "leisure class" skewered by Thorstein Veblen, whose every public move seemed a strutting social ritual and whose "cottages" were stuffed with simulacra; the rise of European aestheticism (epitomized by Oscar Wilde), which exalted fluid theatricality and the manipulation of surfaces.

Still, even as the cultural environment seemed pervaded by misleading surfaces, the fin de siècle also saw a new and more rigorous search for dark truth behind the veil of appearances. For Frazer and Freud, among others, civilization was a mere veneer covering primal irrationality. In both high and popular culture, one can see an emergent fascination with instinctual experience unmediated by convention. Orvell discusses this more unsettling pursuit of the real in Norris's *Vandover and the Brute* (posthumously published in 1914), a tale of a young artist whose commitment to Victorian ideals cannot withstand the disintegrative force of his baser instincts. Having seduced and abandoned a young petit bourgeois woman, he slides into sodden stupefaction after her suicide; he ends on all fours, cleaning workers' cottages on property he used to own, giving voice to the beast within by an occasional howl, forgetting all the genteel draughtsmanship he had learned as a boy in *The Home Book of Art*. Norris's novel is a revealing icon of the religion of reality. But there were other, more profound explorations of authentic experience, in the work, for example, of William James. For James, as for some of his contemporaries, the search for authentic experience was a quest for some cosmic principle of belief that could restore vital purpose to everyday life.

The culture of authenticity Orvell describes does not often plumb these depths. Despite its creators' obsessive desire to wallow in gritty realities, their manifestos seem curiously abstract and remote from everyday life. This is especially true of the many aesthetic pronouncements that equate modern reality with "the machine" or "machine civilization." According to the young Lewis Mumford, for example, modern technology "strips off from the object all the barnacles of association, all the sentimental and pecuniary values which have nothing whatever to do with aesthetic form, and it focuses attention on the object itself." (The older Mumford knew better.)

The idea that technology and aesthetic form could be divorced from "sentimental and pecuniary values" suggests an almost Platonic conception of reality as a timeless sphere elevated above the messy vicissitudes of human prejudice and aspiration. Wright made that conception plain when he distinguished between realism, which merely imitated the surfaces of nature, and Reality, which captured the geometric forms beneath the appearances:

> Realism—sub-geometric—however, is the abuse of this fine thing.
> The 'fine thing' is Reality.
> Reality is spirit, the Essence brooding just behind the aspect.

Despite Wright's modernist enthusiasm for geometric forms and machine civilization, his Reality echoed Platonic and Emersonian idealism.

This tendency toward abstraction affects Orvell as well as the people he writes about. Like them, he uses "the machine" as a term of historical description and explanation, referring frequently to "the triumph of the machine" and to the ways it transformed American life. In the presence of this deus ex machina, we need to remember that the deployment of machines for certain purposes reflects specific human choices, however muddled those choices may have been. It was not "the machine" that transformed American life in the 19th century, but the men who decided to invest money in machines, the scientists and engineers who were fascinated by new technical processes, the managers who were attracted to mechanical models of factory discipline, the workers who struggled to learn or resist new labor procedures—and so on and on.

Though Orvell occasionally nods toward inequalities, on the whole he presents an unreal account of America as a benign, classless society. The inattention to social realities stems less from Platonizing tendencies than from aesthetic preoccupations. Like many of the modernists he discusses, Orvell defines the issues raised by industrialization solely as questions of taste. In his view "the question we are still trying to answer" is: "How has the machine, with its power to reproduce replicas and reproductions, altered our culture? Has it, for example, degraded the quality of civilization by flooding our civilization with sham things? Or has it enlarged and democratized the basis of our culture?"

Posing the questions in this narrow framework allows one to overlook the darker dimensions of industrialization: the creation of new organizational hierarchies in political and economic life, of new forms of inequality, far more thoroughly elaborated in government and

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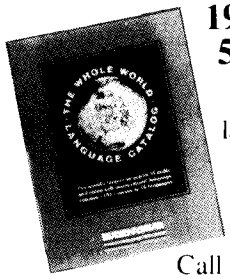

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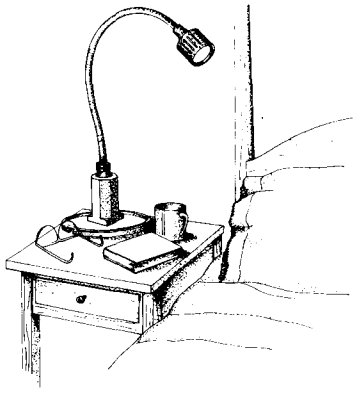

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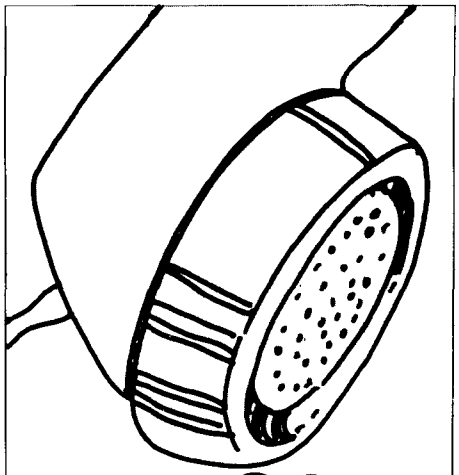

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business than those of Whitman's time had been. By divorcing "the machine" from its institutional expression in the modern corporation and the bureaucratic state, Orvell can endorse Stickley's preposterous claim that the 20th century would be "the Age of the people"—a statement made in 1907, at precisely the historical moment when regulatory and corporate elites began to insulate public policy from popular influence.

There are times when Orvell seems to sense this anti-democratic drift. He criticizes the 1939 World's Fair as "a streamlined vision of the future in which major corporations . . . had assumed the leading positions of power . . . a world where the spontaneous and quirky qualities of the culture . . . had been largely submerged." But he does not suggest that this bleak outcome was a logical outgrowth of the vision shared by many modernist devotees of the real. It was the consequence of a vision that celebrated an abstract, monolithic "machine" as the determining force behind change.

A broad and diffuse determinism characterized the entire culture of authenticity. The critique of the genteel tradition was based on the assumption that "the American Mind" was out of step with "American Reality" and that the two spheres had better be brought into closer relation—not by changing reality, but by forcing mind to conform to it. An idealist pursuit of Reality somehow managed to coexist with an anti-intellectual distrust of words and ideas—except the idea of Reality. One does not have to dig very deeply to locate the philosophical confusion behind this outlook. There is something truly pathetic about the flailings of men like Sullivan and Agee, desperately in flight from their own intelligence, doomed to self-defeat as they attempt to escape language.

"If I could do it, I'd do no writing here at all," Agee announces as he is about to launch a 400-page book. And Sullivan writes of himself as a young man: "For words in themselves he had come to form a passing aversion, since he had noted their tendency to eclipse the vibrant values of immediate reality. Therefore, he preferred to think and feel and contemplate without the use of words." The idea that one can think without words invites derision (especially in the current literary climate, where language has replaced technology as the deus ex machina of choice). But Sullivan's pronouncements, whatever their absurdity, caught the anguished anti-intellectualism at the heart of the religion of reality.

Devotees of the real aimed to dismantle the Victorian notion of culture as a separate sphere, but the project had consequences they could not have foreseen. Willy-nilly, they followed Santayana's famous formulation in bringing "American intellect" out of the colonial mansion and into the sphere of "American will," which was embodied by the skyscraper. Even to those who, like Santayana, abhorred it, the skyscraper embodied some irresistible demiurge of development; resistance to it was impossible, an escape only for the fainthearted and self-indulgent.

Small wonder that the acolytes of reality so often ended in service to the lords of capital. Thus the Stieglitz aesthetic of "meticulous detail [and] biting precision" was easily incorporated into the advertising work of photographers like Margaret Bourke-White, "creating an image of almost magical intensity when focused on a handbag or a pair of shoes." Despite their egalitarian aims, seekers of the authentic were prisoners of an anti-intellectual metaphysic that identified reality with the most thoroughly organized concentrations of technological and economic power in American society. And the modernist pursuit of reality unwittingly smoothed the path toward a postmodern celebration of surfaces. Ceding the definition of reality to the corporation, the artist was free to fiddle with the factitious.

Now, a half century later, we live in an era when culture has been thoroughly accommodated to the "real world" of the executive suite. Multinational corporations have discovered that art patronage is good business; the managers of Philip Morris, Mobil, AT&T and the rest love to pose as "modern Medici." The idea that great art is socially neutral and inoffensive to people in power has been underwritten by millions of corporate dollars. The Victorian notion that culture constituted a repository of values transcending economic calculation now seems a quaint anachronism. It was always naive, of course; but perhaps it deserves another look. We have been so deafened by the din of reality-worship that we have forgotten to ask a simple question: Why not imagine a culture that is fundamentally opposed to a corrupt society? In a "real world" devoted to stretch limousines and hundred-dollar haircuts, there's some value in remembering the transformative power of artistic consciousness, its capacity to "smash reality."

JACKSON LEARS, who teaches history at Rutgers, is working on a history of the relationship between American advertising and American culture.

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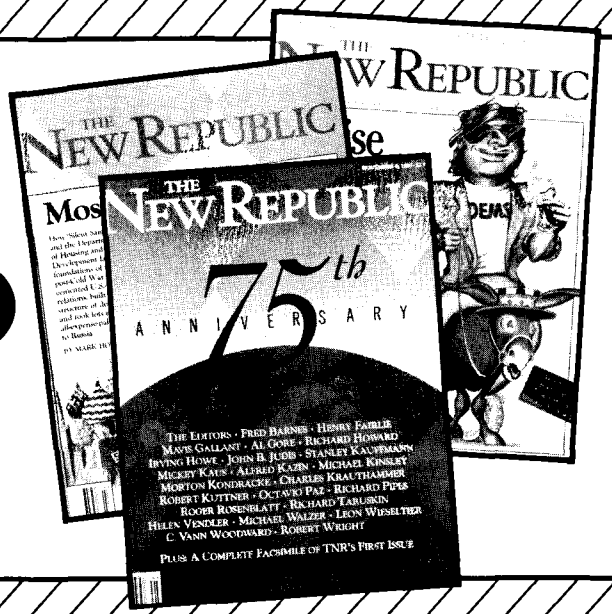

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Flood of Forms

BY RICHARD LOCKE

A History of the World in 10½ Chapters by Julian Barnes

(Knopf, 308 pp., $18.95)

Four years ago in his last "memo for the next millennium," a lecture on the virtues of literary "multiplicity," the protean Italo Calvino discussed the contemporary novel "as an encyclopedia, as a method of knowledge, and above all as a network of connections between the events, the people, and the things of the world. . . . What tends to emerge from the great novels of the 20th century is the idea of an *open* encyclopedia." This phrase is oxymoronic, he's quick to note, since the adjective "open" "certainly contradicts the noun *encyclopedia*, which etymologically implies an attempt to exhaust knowledge of the world by enclosing it in a circle. But today we can no longer think in terms of a totality that is not potential, conjectural, and manifold."

From these bleak abstract adjectives, Calvino exfoliates a splendid argument: "The modern books that we love most," he writes, "are the outcome of a confluence and a clash of a multiplicity of interpretive methods, modes of thought, and styles of expression. Even if the overall design has been minutely planned, what matters is not the enclosure of the work within a harmonious figure, but the centrifugal force produced by it—a plurality of languages as a guarantee of a truth that is not merely partial." Calvino immediately refers to Eliot and Joyce, Jarry and Bakhtin, Gadda and Musil, Valéry and Borges, but he has already acknowledged that the granddaddy of them all is the author of "the most encyclopedic novel ever written, *Bouvard and Pécuchet*," Gustave Flaubert.

Flaubert's ghost haunts modern fiction like Hamlet's father. Remember me: be true to every particle of sensual and social experience, but also be aesthetically perfect; be at once a realist and formalist, sordid and sublime, ironic and pathetic; be exquisitely coarse and brutally fine, comprehensive, diverse, and single-minded. Laboring in the shadow of this master builder, this Haussmann of the novel, Joyce kept his head, at least in *Ulysses*; Nabokov didn't falter, at least in *Lolita*; and such contemporary practitioners as Calvino, Pynchon, Márquez, and Kundera have nobly carried on.

But what about the good old-fashioned English novel? Eighty years after Henry James condemned "loose baggy monsters" and exhorted English novelists to heed the example of Flaubert, 60 years after Virginia Woolf derided the self-satisfied "materialism" of conventional English fiction—the "softly padded first-class railway carriage" carrying Messrs. Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy to "an eternity of bliss spent in the very best hotel in Brighton"—the English novel remains loyal to its tradition of realistic social satire like an Antaeus in Wellington boots.

There are exceptions, to be sure. One thinks of some of Iris Murdoch's early novels and of Doris Lessing's space fiction, of books by Anthony Burgess, William Golding, and John Fowles, or in recent years of Ian McEwan's *The Child in Time*. A writer like V. S. Naipaul quite transcends conventional categories. But by and large contemporary English fiction muddles on as if Bennett and Waugh were the only guides the literary imagination required. Let Frenchmen twirl in semiotic circles; let Germans flounder in historical grotesqueries; let South Americans pile Indian myths upon colonial chronicles, while minimalists mumble and the dithering mass of tinker-toy technicians constructs some bombastic all-American Tower of Babel, but there'll always be an England.

The land of embarrassment and breakfast, as Julian Barnes once put it. But Barnes has always been an exception: an English novelist with an overt interest in ideas and a flair for formal innovation. To which some Colonel Blimp might reply contentiously that Barnes has always wanted to be French.

The first of Barnes's five books, *Metroland*, appeared in 1980. In form it was a fairly conventional coming-of-age novel. Its three parts traced the growth and development of the narrator, an English publisher of 30, married, one child, living in the eponymous London suburb he grew up in. (There's a Lady Metroland in Waugh, we recall.) We see this narrator at three moments of his life: at 16 in 1963 (he's the same age as his author), at 21 in 1968, at 30 in 1977. The settings define the curve of his life: Metroland, Paris, Metroland. Out and back, a gyre or perhaps a devolutionary cycle—"another triumph for the bourgeois steamroller," says his former boyhood comrade-in-arms, a frowsy tiger of unconventionality who now pursues street politics and promiscuity.

The adolescent portraits are especially vivid. Barnes has great fun with the 16-year-olds' snobbish Francophilia, which they graft on to English schoolboy slang; their mottoes "*Ecraser l'infâme*" and "*Epater la bourgeoisie*" produce "How about écrasing someone?" They walk down Oxford Street "trying to look like flâneurs," and their "coruscating idealism expressed itself naturally in a public pose of raucous cynicism." But for all the echoes of such American adolescents as Holden Caulfield and Alexander Portnoy, Barnes's Christopher Lloyd is his own man, especially in his devotion to art:

> Art was the most important thing in life, the constant to which one could be unfailingly devoted and which would never cease to reward; more crucially, it was the stuff whose effect on those exposed to it was ameliorative. It made people not just fitter for friendship and more civilized (we saw the circularity of *that*), but *better*—kinder, wiser, nicer, more peaceful, more active, more sensitive.

Though much of the novel exposes too fervent a devotion to art as an expression of anxious narcissism or French puppy love, these issues will haunt Barnes throughout his career. To raise such hopes about art is quintessentially French, he seems to feel, but his readers cannot miss his English renunciation of aesthetic solipsism.

Of course, there's a long English tradition that proclaims they order this matter better in France. It culminates in Wilde (that Irishman), but cultural nationalism sinks deep in the psyche. Barnes's narrator certainly expresses his disquiet in the novel's Paris section: in France

> I found myself more prone to generalization, to labelling and ticketing and docketing and sectioning and explaining and to lucidity—God, yes, to lucidity. I felt a kind of internal stirring; it wasn't loneliness . . . it wasn't homesickness, it was something to do with being English. I felt, too, as if one part of me was being faintly disloyal to another part.

The narrator remains comically naive, but slowly learns from a French and then an English girl that emotional honesty and connection to other people are superior to any cultural absolutism.

This yuppie apologia may not appear that unfamiliar, but the obsession with

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French language and culture and the unashamed bluntness of the aesthetic debates—French questions that get English answers—are distinctly Barnes's touches. The opening scene of two 16-year-old boys prowling the National Gallery to observe the physical effects of art appreciation on the British masses begins with a sentence emblematic of Barnes's art at its best ("There is no rule against carrying binoculars in the National Gallery"), and the last lines of the book achieve a Nabokovian pathos and precision:

> I stare out of the kitchen window for a few minutes, directly at the [color-distorting orange sodium] street lamp which shines through its gauze of fir. Two o'clock occurs. The lamp snaps off, and I am left with a lozenge-shaped blue-green after-image. I continue to stare; it diminishes, and then, in its turn, and in its quieter way, snaps off.

At its best Barnes's art will strive for the visual comprehension of death.

It was after his second novel, *Before She Met Me* (1982), a more conventional, even melodramatic treatment of the bourgeois vs. artist theme, that Barnes wrote the book that defined his quintessential strengths and brought him international success. When *Flaubert's Parrot* appeared in 1984, the publisher's clever description of it as "a novel in disguise" quite accurately suggested its *mode d'emploi*. Its 15 chapters comprise a miscellany of Flaubert scholarship, both biographical and literary. There is a chronology, a bestiary, a dictionary, a final exam, all interwoven with a series of anecdotes and observations of Flaubertian minutiae that range from questions of the color of Madame Bovary's eyes to her author's French and (possibly) English mistresses. Louise Colet offers her version of their affair. Quotations from Flaubert's letters enlarge the field. Debates about his morals and aesthetic value extend into the realm of literary criticism and theory.

This hectic tapestry is held together by the narrator's quest for the stuffed parrot that Flaubert kept on his desk while writing his homage to the pure in heart, *Un Coeur Simple*, and by the narrator's gradual confession of the sorry truth of his marriage to an English Bovary. As he struggles with his pain by pursuing amateur Flaubertian scholarship in Rouen and Croisset, the narrator drops a trail of crumbs we follow to the revelation that this stodgy English widower, a doctor of 60 plus, is a Larkinesque descendant of Charles Bovary (and of the devoted servant who saw the stuffed bird as the Holy Ghost)—and, in his repetition of so many of Flaubert's words, Flaubert's parrot himself.

This narrator may sound a bit contrived: a character part for John Gielgud, perhaps, wiping a tear away while lecturing about Flaubert's unfinished projects. It's true that the least satisfying element of the book is the conventional story. Flaubert is so much more surprising and touching than our narrator. But the novel abounds in essayistic tours de force, and they all express the character of the unifying narrator. Their moral content is quite resolutely English, E. M. Forsterish. To wit:

> Flaubert teaches you to gaze upon the truth and not blink from its consequences; . . . he teaches you not to approach a book in search of moral or social pills—literature is not a pharmacopoeia; he teaches the pre-eminence of Truth, Beauty, Feeling and Style. And if you study his private life, he teaches courage, stoicism, friendship; the importance of intelligence, skepticism and wit; the folly of cheap patriotism; the virtue of being able to remain by yourself in your own room; the hatred of hypocrisy; distrust of the doctrinaire; the need for plain speaking.

This all sounds refreshingly old-fashioned in an age when so much French and modish American criticism is still proclaiming the death of the author and the birth of the text. But, above all, *Flaubert's Parrot* is a performance on the high wire, risky business that combines convention and flaming idiosyncrasy in ways that again evoke the memory of Nabokov. Indeed, the following not untypical kick at the end of a chapter might well have been lifted (in both the form and punning content) from Nabokov's *Strong Opinions*:

> Do not imagine that Art is something which is designed to give gentle uplift and self-confidence. Art is not a *brassière*. At least, not in the English sense. But do not forget that *brassière* is the French for life-jacket.

In contrast to the bravura erudition and dexterity of its glamorous predecessor, Barnes's fourth novel, *Staring at the Sun* (1986), refuses all theatrical self-display. Its tender, somber lyricism develops the pathetic themes of *Flaubert's Parrot* into a muted meditation on last things. It follows the life of a representative lower-middle-class woman from her birth in 1922 through her solemn childhood and adolescence, her marriage and divorce, her independent life as a waitress and later as a devoted traveler (China, the Grand Canyon), and her final years in the computerized 21st century as her only son (now in his 60s) meditates upon religion, suicide, love, and death.

Most of the novel employs a precision that verges on minimalism, although in the final third Barnes shifts much of his

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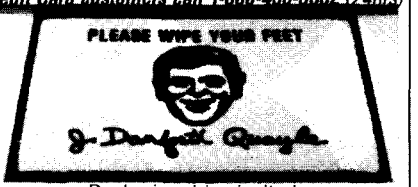

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focus to the philosophical investigations of the son interrogating a Brave New World computer. But some of the most impressive writing is the most conservative: quiet domestic and psychological details that support such plangent declarations as "Jean's marriage lasted 20 years. After the guilty disappointment of the honeymoon came the longer, slower dismay of living together."

This may suggest that Barnes was retreating into English lachrymosity, but in fact what is most moving and accomplished in *Staring at the Sun* are moments of—again—Nabokovian eloquence. The paired set pieces of an RAF pilot's vision of a double sunrise in 1941 and the heroine's complementary vision of a double sunset in 2021 are appropriately spectacular. Here is the sunset in the last lines of the novel:

> The sun's descent seemed quicker this time, a smooth slipping away. The earth did not greedily chase it, but lay flatly back with its mouth open. The big orange sun settled on the horizon, yielded a quarter of its volume to the accepting earth, then a half, then three-quarters, and then, easily, without argument, the final quarter. For some minutes a glow continued from beneath the horizon, and Jean did, at last, smile towards this postmortal phosphorescence. Then the airplane turned away, and they began to lose height.

"Postmortal phosphorescence" certainly attains the "precision of poetry and intuition of science" the arch Russo-American Master praised so highly in a work of literature.

Barnes's newly published fifth novel, *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters*, is his longest, most jocose, and most heterogeneous. Its comic grandiosity is apparent from its aggressive title. A history, then, not fiction; divided with all-confident precision into chapters, though we note the humorous, if whimsical precision of "10½." The title suggests a book that will flaunt genres, categories of communication, numbers that don't neatly conform to our devotion to the order of ten. This self-advertising title is a boast that mocks itself by calling attention to its literary and cognitive form.

In the first chapter, "The Stowaway," we immediately encounter myth, zoology, bureaucratic jargon, and a debunking colloquial voice that suggests a stand-up comedian. "They put the behemoths in the hold along with the rhinos, the hippos, and the elephants," it begins. "It was a sensible decision to use them as ballast; but you can imagine the stench. And there was no-one to muck out. . . . I am hardly squeamish, but even I used to shudder at the scene below decks: a row of squinting monsters being manicured in a sewer." We're obviously on the Ark and soon get jokes about "stool pigeons" and "ratting" and rocking the boat. We learn the mystery narrator was not chosen but stowed away and that the Ark was not a single ship but a flotilla; it rained for a year and a half and there were waters upon the earth for about four years. Noah was "an old rogue with a drink problem," and "the arrangements, frankly, were a shambles."

The narrator is vituperative about the "professional incompetence" and "the divisiveness of God's animal policy" about the clean and the unclean creatures. The Ark was just a "floating cafeteria," as Noah scarfed down beasts; "lunch first, then piety, that was the rule." God was a "really oppressive role model," and as for the rainbow, "It wasn't much of a deal. And was it legally enforceable? Try getting a rainbow to stand up in court." Man is a "very unevolved species" as far as the narrator is concerned. In the last line we learn he is a woodworm.

Such humor recalls the spiel in Stanley Elkin's *The Living End* and Joseph Heller's *God Knows*. For all its energy and speed, its *spritz*, this wiseguy biblical revisionism may not strike American ears as freshly as it may the less Masonic English. And in this mode, freshness is all. But Barnes has barely begun.

The succeeding chapters exploit imagery from the Ark: selection, triage, the clean and unclean, cannibalism, drowning, shipwreck, Mount Ararat, the woodworm, the death-watch beetle (that is really banging its head for love), reindeer. Love and history, art and catastrophe: these are the themes that promise to unite the almost manic proliferation of events and styles that constitutes this fictional history. Like some damned sinner left behind, the reader is soon cast into a foaming sea of diverse characters and events; but without a frame narrative or voice (or two or three), there's little to hold on to.

There are plenty of anecdotes in the nine-and-a-half chapters to come, but too few unifying actions or organically developing themes or arguments. The effect is not *collagiste* or symphonic: the presumably tragi-comic *concordia discors* remains discordant. One understands the rejection of teleology in such a counter-testament, but as they march along like Noah's beasts the chapters appear almost willfully, even frivolously incongruous in tone and substance. And what surprises is that so many of them seem casually composed, facetious rather than witty, without Barnes's dextrous epigrammatic snap.

A brief summary might convey the curious sense of dearth in the midst of plenty that this seemingly cornucopious novel comes to achieve. In the second chapter Arab terrorists take over a cruise ship, divide the passengers according to their nationalities, and proceed to execute them two by two. The central figure here is a lazy highbrow TV celebrity forced to become the glib spokesman for the executioners—his historical tour-guide patter makes him an apparent accomplice, though he's doing much of it to save his girlfriend's life: all for love. The third chapter is a mock 16th-century ecclesiastical disputation on the expulsion of woodworm from a French church. The fourth describes the plight of a woman adrift in the South Pacific after a nuclear holocaust.

In the fifth chapter, Barnes explicitly confronts history with art, recounting the wreck of the French frigate *Medusa* off the coast of Africa in 1816 and offering a coruscating series of art-historical interpretations of Géricault's painting of the catastrophe. There follow chapters on fanatic religious expeditions to Mount Ararat in 1840 and 1977; three sea stories—the *Titanic*, Jonah and the whale, the *St. Louis* bearing Jewish refugees in 1939; a sleazy film star's letters from the Amazon; and the dream of an *homme moyen sensuel* from Leicester, England, who envisions heaven as an eternity of perfect breakfasts, shopping, golf, sex, and "meeting famous people."

What are we to make of this serio-comic extravaganza? In a "parenthesis"—the half-chapter of the title—the author supplies an essay by someone called Julian Barnes on the experience and meaning of faithful sexual love. Here he didactically obliges us: "The history of the world? Just voices echoing in the dark; images that burn for a few centuries and then fade; stories, old stories that sometimes seem to overlap; strange links, impertinent connections. . . . Our panic and our pain [in what he's called the "hospital bed of the present"] are only eased by soothing fabulation; we call it history." And to history he opposes love and a belief in the pursuit of objective truth. "We must believe in love, just as we must believe in free will and objective truth . . . [so] we can face history down."

This all brims over with such feeling

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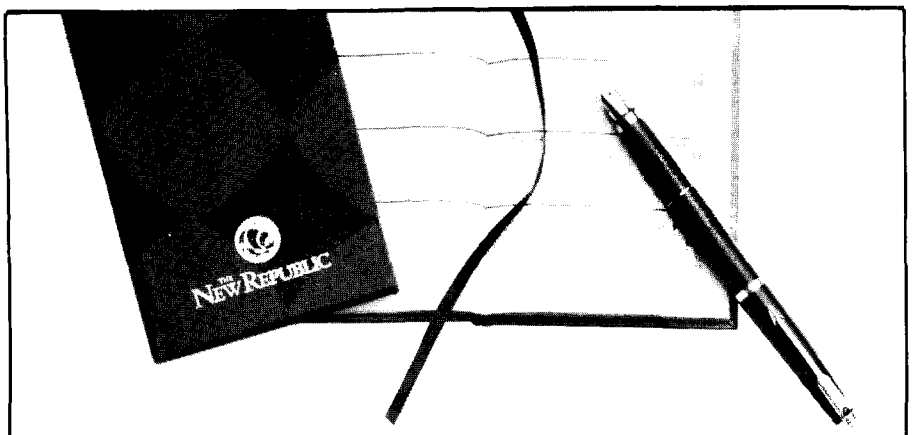
and goodwill that it seems churlish to even think it may be verging on the sentimental. But surely this seems weaker than some of the set pieces in Barnes's earlier, old-fashioned fiction, less moving than the lambent narrative of *Staring at the Sun*, less original than the prestidigitation of *Flaubert's Parrot*. It's not that Barnes's virtuosity is wholly absent here. The most successful chapter is the tour de force on the *Medusa* and Géricault's problem: "How do you turn catastrophe into art?" Barnes's answer is enlivening when he describes and analyzes the painting and the circumstances of its composition, but again becomes somewhat bald and declarative in its peroration:

> The picture's secret lies in the pattern of its energy.... We are all lost at sea, washed between hope and despair, hailing something that may never come to rescue us. Catastrophe has become art; but this is no reducing process. It is freeing, enlarging, explaining.

At such climactic moments, there is little in the diction, tone, or logic to suggest awareness of the complexities mastered in *Flaubert's Parrot* or, for that matter, of the critique of liberal humanism mounted in the past 30 years in France and Germany, Italy and America. One shudders to recall the drear names of Marxists, structuralists, poststructuralists, and deconstructionists ad infinitum. One certainly doesn't want a novel to dwindle into trendy jargon, but what we encounter here in lieu of novelistic exploration and analysis of the sort Calvino described—and Barnes himself so magisterially deployed in his two previous books—is perilously close to comforting intellectual clichés. Such are the risks a writer runs when he attempts to reach fresh fields and pastures new. The essayistic variations can slip back into nostalgic fluencies and the narratives become a historical slide show with entertaining anecdotes and funny accents in the voice-over.

The themes and variations of this *History* never really accumulate enough significance and force to generate much forward motion. They are the objects (or the victims) more than the sources of centrifugal force. Still, Barnes's literary energy and daring are nearly unparalleled among contemporary English novelists. With such a passion for history, art, and formal innovation, with such fulgent wit and bright discursive skill, he will most likely push on along the high Parnassian path he's beaten beside Nabokov, Calvino, and Kundera. For the other way, the older English way, leads down to Aldous Huxley.

RICHARD LOCKE teaches English and comparative literature at Columbia University.



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Persian Visions

BY ANITA DESAI

The Pilgrim's Rules of Etiquette by Taghi Modaressi

(Doubleday, 279 pp., $18.95)

Taghi Modaressi is a member of the faculty in the department of psychiatry at the University of Maryland School of Medicine; he is director of the Center for Infant Study; he is married to the novelist Anne Tyler . . . in other words, for all his Iranian antecedents, he is very much an American, and actively involved in American life. To read *The Pilgrim's Rules of Etiquette*, however, one would find no hint of it. Oh yes, there are a few lapses into American speech, such as "snuck into," but that is all. The creative part of Modaressi's mind dwells in another land, very far away, so far away as to assume the appearance of a mirage or a dream.

Not that Modaressi's book—his second novel—is hazy or indistinct. But it does not have the hard, sharp clarity of the near and the present. It is, instead, a waking dream, in which recognizable figures behave strangely, in which nothing is as expected. Fact and fantasy fly through the air like snowflakes in a storm, or hover like the figures in a painting by Chagall. Is this due to the writer's distance—in time and in space—from Iran, which is the setting of his book? Or is it a matter of style, the peculiar way a writer has of taking over and re-creating material so that he impresses upon it a vision distinctly his own?

There are elements in Modaressi's novel that are recognizable enough to all who read the daily papers: the war between Iran and Iraq, the enforced "martyrdom" of an entire generation in those two countries, the dilemmas of people who are brought up to live ordinary lives but are forced to cope with extraordinary ones instead. The makings of a modern saga, in short. But in Modaressi's hands these elements do not by any means fall into any such predictable pattern. His gifts are different. He spins and weaves on Western looms, but draws from Eastern sources.

The pilgrim referred to in the book's title is the elderly scholar Hadi Besharat, who has spent a lifetime pondering such matters as the similarity between Muslim and Christian saints. Besharat finds that he cannot hide behind his books, cannot take refuge in abstractions, as if the world of men and women did not exist. For a start, there is his wife, the bored, sulky, dissatisfied Farangu, who had once sung at the opera—he met and fell in love with her when she sang *Tosca*—but who is now bored by life in wartime Tehran with her absent-minded husband. She pines for America, where her son Khosru is trying to make his fortune; but he has just suffered the twin misfortunes of lending money to a man who cannot see the urgency of returning it, and of establishing a car wash on a route where few cars pass and even fewer stop.

There are the friends and acquaintances of the neighborhood, of course. And there is an entire cast of characters no longer living, but for Hadi Besharat more profoundly present than anyone else—his dear tutor Fakhr Zanjani, and his favorite student, Mehrdad, whose death on the battlefield shatters whatever security was left the aging philosopher in his shabby old study. The shock propels him once again on a pilgrimage, just as years ago the death of his "father-jon" had done, when he had heard "the horse hoofs warning him: Hadi-jon, prepare yourself for a long walk and the hardships of a journey! A human being is only a pilgrim pursuing a destination! He must be thoroughly familiar with the pilgrim's rules of etiquette!"

The "martyr" Mehrdad had been, in life, an ordinary enough young man, who had fancied fine clothes, drink, and dancing, who also had an interest in the ancient history of Iran. He was, in other words, a young man of promise. In his death, he brings his entire neighborhood together in mourning. But not altogether willingly: his mother, for instance, wants only to be left alone, and turns away all who come to her door. She not only becomes harsh and bitter—that would be understandable—but she breaks into totally unbecoming behavior. She tries to peddle her dead son's clothes to the shocked professor, pointing out their excellent quality, trying to strike a hard bargain so that she can buy a ticket to America. Nili—"Miss Nili"—the young girl who was in love with Mehrdad, dresses up in his old fatigues under her black veil, runs to the professor's house, and begs him to take her on as a student in Mehrdad's place. And Besharat himself, totally distraught, runs up and down through the neighborhood and develops the fancy of going to the front himself: not to fight, not to avenge Mehrdad's death, but to set eyes upon Mesopotamia, the ancient land of his dreams.

"I want to write a paper on the roots of the war with Iraq," he tells the general to whom he is applying for permission to go to the front. The general tells him, "You're wasting your time. All wars are a sham. They've struck a deal. All the strategies are decided on the other side of the world. They want to cheat this poor nation. With so much education, how can you be so gullible?" But Besharat defends himself: "I hope to see the front from up close. People don't go to the front for nothing. It's a human instinct, like the salmon's instinct that forces him to swim against the current to the mouth of the river. It's like the polar cranes' instinct that forces them to fly thousands of miles to the tropics. Mesopotamia has the same pull."

Not that he, or the other characters, remain constant in their desires, or in their behavior. Farangu can change from the sulky and bored ex-opera singer into a kittenish, giggling woman when her cousin is around. Nili would be described as a "minx" in another context: she is flirtatious, flighty, wayward, uncomfortable with the role of the grieving lover. Even Besharat displays his grief in strange ways. He writes a letter to Professor Humphrey of Whitehurst College where he once taught (and to whom practically every young man in the neighborhood applies for admission to that "promised land") and signs himself "Mehrdad." He remembers Huri the gypsy dancer, who had entranced him in his youth, and whose memory makes his body swing to a most unsuitable rhythm. The neighborhood becomes suspicious, too, of Nili's frequent visits, often nocturnal, to his house.

Everyone's conduct, then, suddenly seems wayward; and their moods are as inconstant as flames in the wind, as wishcloths fluttering from the poles around the shrines of the dead. It is Modaressi's manner to state these facts as clearly and as precisely as fine Persian calligraphy, and within these formal figures to conceal, like the great calligraphers, hidden messages. It was this art that Besharat had learned from his history teacher, Fakhr Zanjani, the art of "drawing arabesques in the air and inscribing words

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inside each other." And so the characters in Modaressi's novel dance and gambol, bow and supplicate, but within such conduct and such speech lie other modes of speech and conduct.

It is Modaressi's strange vision—poetic, elusive, often unsubstantial and hallucinatory—that inscribes the inner, hidden messages within the outer ones that are clearly stated, so that each word has its shadow, its ghost dancing behind and under it. The fascinated eye of the reader follows these double movements in the air, compelled and bemused by their grace, by their beauty, by their inner truth. There are many metaphors and similes one can employ to describe Modaressi's style; one can draw them from his own text. When Professor Humphrey suggests to Besharat, for example, that he stay on in America and teach at Whitehurst College, Besharat replies that it would turn him into a quince-orange or a mule:

> To be sure there are common features between the Easterner and the Westerner, and in certain respects they can benefit from each other. But in the end their encounters remain barren. It's like the quince-orange tree, which is a graft between a quince and an orange, or the mule which is the result of the horse and donkey copulation. Of course each has his use. But they themselves become fruitless.

This insight compels Besharat to return to Iran, to the dark and troubled folds of Iran's history. It is typical of Modaressi that he should choose to place the poetic beside the prosaic, clumsy, or even the droll image. He enjoys linking the dreamlike to the mundane—for the sake of irony and comedy, but also for the sake of veracity.

The quick, light, glancing manner in which he achieves this "double-writing" or arabesque surely has to do with the fitting of his Iranian self into his American setting, of the remembered Persian tongue into the practiced English one. This produces a language—and a way of thinking—that is not Western, nor quite Eastern, but a shimmering amalgam of the two. One wonders, on reading a note of thanks "to Alma Troccolie for helping me prepare the English version of this novel," if Modaressi wrote it originally in Farsi and then translated it into English.

It would explain the quality of his language. A Western writer of English might write a sentence like "Her dyed brows and eyeliner gave her moonlit face a dead look like a photographic negative," or create an image like "the dawn spread through the air like a sheet of nylon." In describing a sleeping woman, a Western writer might observe, as Modaressi does, that "the wax mask of sleep melted over her face." But he would never say, with Modaressi, that "the up and down of her chest reminded him of the circular movement of epochs, the eternal rotation of years and centuries, the repetition of seasons, the ceaseless journeys of the moon and stars." That juxtaposition of the physical and the present with the abstract and the remote is owed to an Eastern manner of thought, and comes naturally to those who live in the East.

There are constant reminders, in Modaressi's prose, that the writer is not a native speaker of English. He tells of the professor's one act of infidelity, with the blond Mrs. Chadwick in London, and writes that Besharat later finds a note from her instructing him "to fix himself a continental breakfast and coffee and not to forget to wash the plates before leaving the apartment." The latter clause strikes one as plausible enough, but the specification of "continental breakfast" is distinctly odd. These small details are like so many leaves and petals in one of those intricate floral designs painted by Eastern artists as a border around the subject.

But even when it comes to the subject itself, the focal point of the novel—war and death and the journey through the havoc we call life—there is a curious difference in the way this writer from Iran hovers around and above the subject but never quite descends upon it. Yes, sirens sound, planes roar, bombs fall, people mourn, and the coffins of the dead are paraded through the streets. Yet it never seems to be the central theme, the overwhelming preoccupation, of the novel. The details, some quite small and slight, and their intimate, deft, improbable juxtaposition make up the stuff of the novel, which remains diaphanous and elusive.

In the final chapter, Besharat does go on a pilgrimage of a sort—by taxi, with Nili, to Mehrdad's shrine. The taxi driver listens on his radio throughout the drive to the passion of St. Muslem's children:

> "Oh Hosein, if my heart
> Did not accept the burden of love
> It carried the burden of your tragedy all alone,
> Hosein, Hosein-jon. . . ."

Meanwhile Nili listens to a cassette hidden in the folds of her veil and Besharat plays an imaginary violin to himself, and in that manner they travel to Mehrdad's shrine. Once there, Besharat dances in the porch, exhilarated by the landscape and the fine spring air, dances until he falls. Thus everything comes together, death with life, and instead of going to the front he visits a schoolroom where he once taught. That, too, is the past, as remote and dignified as Mesopotamia. By entering it and reviving it, he is able to summon up the wisdom of the ancient days that his heart craves. He is intoxicated with joy. It suffices him; and through Modaressi's art, it suffices the reader, too.

ANITA DESAI is the author most recently of *Baumgartner's Bombay* (Knopf).

CORRESPONDENCE *continued from page 6*

of Shakespeare criticism). I do not believe, or say, that "Shakespeare was a stupid man who parroted the orthodoxies of his day." First of all, the passage he quotes (about Shakespeare as a mere "verbocrat") is a paraphrase of Wittgenstein, who has as much claim to philosophic impartiality as Bloom or Marx, and who is harder to attack than I am. Second, I do not argue that Shakespeare was, even in his own time, and certainly from the perspective of ours, a conservative, but it is Norbrook alone who equates conservatism and stupidity. Our experience with Ronald Reagan should not delude us into believing that all conservatives are idiots. I'm sure Shakespeare was as at least as intelligent as Edmund Burke or T. S. Eliot; but if he were alive today, would he be writing for THE NEW REPUBLIC?

GARY TAYLOR
Waltham, Massachusetts

Time piece

To the editors:

The Washington Diarist ("Talking Dirty," October 30) may be reassured that even in the Northeast Corridor there are islands of *mañana* and patches of South Seas unneurotic relaxedness about the passage of time and the precision of time-telling. Were the Diarist to spend only one nervous minute in Trenton's railroad station, he would observe that the corridor clock nearest the platform stairs is two minutes slow; Amtrak's "Soleri"-board digital gnomon is four minutes fast; New Jersey Transit's ticket-booth clock registers correct Zone Time, while the Amtrak ticket agents' is a minute ahead; the front waiting-hall clock is two minutes behind; and the fast-food concessionaire's wall time piece, conforming to his service's character, is one minute fast. The range, from which a transient Pacific Westerner may select, is six minutes. A nervous Easterner could consult his wristwatch—and remain in anxious doubt about the time and the trains.

JONATHAN GELL
Trenton, New Jersey

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COSTA RICA DIARIST

Democracia

WHERE WERE YOU WHEN YOU learned about the fall of the Wall? Me, I was in a grubby, dimly lit roadside police station in rural Costa Rica. Having just emerged from two days of shooting rapids on a rubber raft through jungle mountains, followed by a morning at a remote, coconut-covered beach on the Atlantic coast where the sand and the inhabitants alike are mostly black and mostly untroubled, I was out of touch with everything except the elements. In the ramshackle port town of Limón I'd stood with two gringo traveling companions on a litter-strewn sidewalk teeming with dogs and drunks and watched helplessly as the last bus of the night, packed solid with campesinos, pulled out for San José. Somehow we'd managed to find a transplanted Panamanian taxi driver willing to make the trip. We'd been speeding for an hour down a dusty highway flanked by moonlit banana fields when a roadblock loomed. Green-uniformed men, pistols holstered at their rib cages, waved us to the side of the road behind trucks that had passed us long before. While the Civil Guardsmen picked through our luggage, looking for cocaine, I wandered into their grubby headquarters. On the floor was a wrinkled, day-old copy of *La República*, a San José newspaper. Page one had a bootprint on it and above, a headline: ¡CAYÓ EL MURO DE BERLIN! I rushed out and demanded of the taxi driver, "Is it true? Is it true they tore down the Berlin Wall?" "Oh, sure," he said. It was already old news. For two days I'd lifted mine eyes unto the hills, and when I looked down again they'd abolished communism.

OBVIOUSLY I HAD SOME CATCHing up to do. At the newsstand around the corner from my hotel in San José the *Miami Herald* was on sale (along with the *National Enquirer* and, weirdly, THE NEW REPUBLIC). I paged eagerly through the paper, looking for Washington's reaction to the great events. I found it in the stirring words of the Secretary of Defense, Richard Cheney: "We must not be euphoric." Of course not. Very sage advice. Quite right. Why be euphoric just because a nonviolent, leaderless, joyful, unvengeful civic revolution has erased the Berlin Wall overnight, eviscerating the strongest Stalinist regime in Europe and leaving its temporary custodians desperately promising free elections and a total transformation of society? Why get all happy just because Poland already has an elected non-Communist government and because a year or two from now Hungary and East Germany will almost certainly be parliamentary democracies with a vigorous free press and harmless little Portugal-sized Communist parties (if the Communists luck out) and because Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria (Bulgaria!) may not be far behind? Why give way to elation just because this vast, peaceful, unprecedented liberation is taking place with the explicit blessing of the leader of the Soviet Union? No. We must not be euphoric. We might lose sight of the important things, like the need for nuclear modernization.

MY OLD BOSS JIMMY CARTER IS a popular man in Central America, where he spends considerably more time than he does in Washington. Last week, however, he was in Washington—for the big reunion of Carter people, which I was obliged to miss on account of being in Central America. The atmosphere at the reunion, I've since been told, was congenial and gratifyingly free of shame. Time has burnished some of Carter's achievements, especially the Egyptian-Israeli peace and the placement of human rights upon the foreign policy agenda. Even so, the warm glow that surrounds Carter these days is undoubtedly due more to his exemplary performance as an ex-President than to any massive reappraisals of his Presidency. His political failure remains. But I'm beginning to think it was part of a bigger pattern, and I don't mean some sort of global swing to conservatism. 1979 was such a dreadful year everywhere, thanks largely to oil prices and the attendant economic misery, that in much of the Western world the ins were cast out by the voters at the earliest opportunity and have been kept out ever since. In the United States, Britain, and West Germany, liberals or social democrats were in power in 1979 and have lost every subsequent election. But in France, Spain, Australia, Greece, and Italy, conservatives were in power in 1979—and ditto. The key variable would seem to be neither ideology nor competence, but incumbency at the wrong time. Nice theory, no? All right, nice alibi.

AS MY UNSCHEDULED REST STOP showed, Costa Rica may be a trifle weak in the unreasonable search and seizure department, but it's the only country in Central America in which one can be flagged down by armed representatives of the state without fearing for one's life or liberty. The place is incorrigibly democratic. In fact, democracy is as important to Costa Rica's sense of nationhood as it is to the United States'. I happened to be in San José for a big nighttime celebration of the day—November 7, 1889—when Costa Ricans took to the streets to force the bloodless departure of a president who had lost an election but had refused to leave office. Now, a hundred years later, the main square of the city—called Democracy Plaza, naturally—was filled with perhaps 10,000 happy people. At one end of the square, on the steps of the floodlit National Museum (which was the main military fortress until 1949, when Costa Rica wisely abolished its army), President Oscar Arias, his Cabinet, and members of the one-house National Assembly sat on folding chairs. Security for these dignitaries was provided by Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts holding hands. The big attraction was a sort of pageant in which 1,500 kids wearing white shirts and hats and carrying torches pretended to storm the fortress. Then speeches praising democracy and boasting about having no army. Then the wistful-sounding Costa Rican national anthem, which all sang feelingly. Finally a fireworks display, consisting of two rickety wooden signs lit up by sputtering sparklers—VIVA COSTA RICA and 100 AÑOS DE DEMOCRACIA—and a few skyrockets that would have been rejected as insufficiently spectacular by the volunteer fire department in my hometown. Some of the skyrockets blew up on the roof of the museum before they could be launched. Costa Ricans are not good with explosives. It was all touchingly sweet—something one does not normally associate with politics in Central America.

AT A RECEPTION FOLLOWING THE festivities, one of President Arias's aides told me that the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), a U.S. government agency, has been pumping cash into right-wing Costa Rican think tanks that oppose Arias and consistently try to undermine his efforts for peace in Nicaragua and El Salvador. I later learned that the money in question actually comes through the National Republican Institute, which gets it from NED—a distinction of greater moment in Washington than in San José. Even so, I'm not sure which was more irritating: the idea that U.S. taxpayers' money is being used to promote opposition to a democratic leader who has done far more to promote the true national interests of the U.S. than any number of *contras* or colonels, or the fact that such funds are being spent in Costa Rica at all. Costa Rica requires no lessons in democracy. Instead of sending NED money to Costa Rica, maybe we should send it to East Berlin. And maybe we should get the Costa Ricans to tell us how to spend it.

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